Silvia Wojczewski

AFRODIASPORIC IDENTITIES IN GERMANY

Life-Stories of Millennial Women

[transcript] Culture and Social Practice

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Contents

Abstract

This book examines the making of African diasporic identities among middle-class women born and raised in the German city of Frankfurt. It approaches this by considering practices of travel, care, activism and storytelling on various spatial scales: local (Frankfurt), national (Germany) and global.

Employing ethnographic methods of participant observation, life-story analysis and family ethnography, the study – for which fieldwork was carried out in 2017 and 2018 – reflects on the lives of five Afrodescendant women in Germany, members of the second generation as children of at least one migrant parent. The author of the study was herself brought up in the same Frankfurt neighbourhoods as her research participants, which gave her intimate knowledge of the study contexts and privileged access to interlocutors. The book studies the formation of diaspora identifications through kinship on two levels: 1) the individual and intimate making of diasporic identity via engagement in transnational family life and history, including travelling to 'origins', as well as 2) the collective creation of diaspora and 'chosen family' through coalitions in Black (feminist) political communities.

The book is structured along three dimensions. The first, employing historical analysis and bibliographical data, locates specific case studies in the more general historical context of the African diaspora in Germany and Frankfurt since the early twentieth century. The second, employing life-story interviews and participant observation, explores the relations between dwelling and travelling among the study subjects over a timespan of more than 30 years. It analyses experiences as well as strategies and practices that the women applied to build Afrodiasporic identity. These range from seeking identification in Black American cultural production as teens in Frankfurt, via engaging actively in anti-racist activism, anti-racist education and literature for themselves and their children, to positive encounters with places of ancestral origin as adult women. The third dimension deals with travelling as an important practice for negotiating Afrodiasporic identity. The lived experience of being mobile is of particular importance for building transnational kinship relations and diasporic communities. The travels undertaken by the women range from a three-week trip to meet (previously unknown) family members to a full year's work placement abroad. Such diasporic journeys differ from both traditional

roots tourism and ordinary transnational family visits. Building kinship is only one among several motivations driving the women's mobility: others include learning and practising particular parts of their selves, seeking to embody Afrodiasporic identity in places they consider to be origins, and connecting with transnational Black (political) communities. Travel changes perspectives on identity narratives and allows subjects to build new forms of relationships, networks and actions. Last but not least, the book analyses coming of age stories and stories of travelling as narratives of the self.

Résumé

Ce travail explore la construction d'identités diasporiques africaines des femmes issues de classe moyenne, nées et socialisées à Francfort, en Allemagne. Il aborde ce thème en considérant les pratiques de voyage, de soins, d'activisme et de narration et en explorant différentes échelles spatiales : locale (Francfort), nationale (Allemagne) et mondiale.

Avec des méthodes ethnographiques d'observation participante, d'analyse des récits de vie et d'ethnographie de famille, employées lors d'un travail de terrain réalisé en 2017 et 2018, l'étude interroge la vie de cinq femmes afrodescendantes, faisant partie de la deuxième génération d'enfants né d'un parent migrant. L'auteure, élevée dans les mêmes quartiers de Francfort que ses participantes, présente une connaissance intime des contextes d'étude et un accès privilégié aux interlocutrices de l'étude. La formation d'identifications diasporiques est étudiée par le biais de la parenté à deux niveaux: 1) la formation individuelle et intime de l'identité diasporique en s'engageant dans une vie et une histoire familiale transnationale, y compris les voyages vers les « origines », et 2) la création collective de la diaspora et de la « famille choisie » par le biais de coalitions dans les communautés politiques (féministes) noires.

L'étude est structurée en trois dimensions. La première s'appuie sur des données bibliographiques et une analyse historique qui situent l'étude de cas dans le contexte plus général, depuis le début du vingtième siècle, de la diaspora africaine en Allemagne et à Francfort. La seconde, qui s'appuie sur des récits de vie et des observations participantes, explore les relations entre habiter et voyage. Elle analyse les expériences ainsi que les stratégies et les pratiques appliquées, sur une période de plus de 30 ans, par les femmes pour former une identité Afrodiasporique. Il s'agit de la recherche d'une identification dans la production culturelle noire américaine lors de l'adolescence à Francfort, de l'engagement actif dans l'activisme antiraciste, de l'éducation et la littérature antiracistes pour elles-mêmes et leurs enfants ainsi que de l'effort de construire une relation positive avec les lieux d'origine ancestrale en tant que femmes adultes. La troisième dimension concerne le voyage comme pratique de construction d'identité afrodiasporique. L'expérience vécue de la mobilité est particulièrement importante pour la construction de relations de parenté trans-

nationales et de communautés diasporiques. Ces voyages vont d'un séjour de trois semaines pour rencontrer des membres de la famille (inconnus jusqu'alors) à une année de stage à l'étranger. Ces voyages diasporiques diffèrent à la fois du tourisme de racines et de visites familiales transnationales. La création de liens de parenté n'est qu'une des nombreuses motivations qui animent les femmes. La possibilité d'apprendre et de mettre en pratique certaines dimensions de leur vie, d'incarner l'identité afrodiasporique dans des lieux qu'elles considèrent comme des origines, ainsi que le souhait de se connecter à des communautés (politiques) noires transnationales motivent également ces mobilités. Le voyage change les perspectives sur les récits identitaires et permet aux sujets de construire de nouvelles formes de relations, de réseaux et d'actions. Enfin, l'étude analyse les récits de passage à l'âge adulte et les récits de voyage en tant que récits de soi.

Par ses résultats, l'étude contribue à des discussions théoriques plus larges sur les relations entre pratique diasporique et conscience générationnelle; entre la classe, le genre et les expériences de racisme/racialisation en Allemagne ; et entre la pratique du voyage et la renégociation de la parenté.

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1. Introduction

Vignette 1: Afroeuropeans conference, July 2019

Sitting in front of the University of Lisbon with Mélanie P., a Swiss PhD student in sociology and also a Black activist involved in two Afrodiasporic and anti-racist collectives,[1] we compare this year's Afroeuropeans conference to the one that took place in Finland two years earlier. It was there, in Tampere in 2017, that I started my ethnographic fieldwork, an event that Mélanie P. had also attended. There are panels about police violence, structural racism and the notion of 'race' and how it still very much matters today in a variety of different contexts. Many Black political collectives from different countries are present: Afro-feminist collectives that have emerged in the last ten years; such as the Swiss *CAS* (Collectif Afro Suisse, founded in 2009), *Mwasi* from France (founded 2014), or collectives founded in Portugal in 2016, such as *Djass* and *Femafro*. The members of these collectives are largely women, partly because most of them have feminist roots. They connect with each other inside and outside the lecture halls at side events, discuss strategies and goals and share food and drink. After the 2017 Afroeuropeans conference in Tampere, Mélanie P. suggested that we organise a panel together in Lisbon with another colleague of hers, Paméla O.; fortunately, we now find ourselves doing just that. Our panel is about Afroeuropean and Black life stories. In the call for papers, we invited people to present their work on Afroeuropean life stories/(auto)biographies and specified that we particularly welcomed proposals that involved the creative performance of life stories:

> We invite contributions that can either be scientific papers that include Afroeuropean (auto)biographies or (auto)biographic presentations in the first person in all its expressive forms (performance, dance, spoken word, stand-up comedy).

Although our panel is the only one that specifically addresses life stories, this theme does appear in several other panels as well. Many people – scholars, activists, artists

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1   I use Black with a capital B to underline that this term does not simply refer to skin complexion. Rather it refers to an emic category used by people of African descent to indicate a political affiliation with other racialised people (hooks 2020).

– talk about their own life experiences in order to reflect on themes of home, belong-
ing, diaspora, transnationalism or racism.

In our panel, we welcome two women who present their own life stories in a
creative way.

One is a woman from Galicia, Spain, whose mother is from Equatorial Guinea,
the other a woman from Portugal with a parent from Angola.

The Spanish presenter impresses me in particular. Tiffany López Ganet begins
her talk by saying that she travelled to Equatorial Guinea a few years ago, which is the
country of origin of her mother who migrated to Spain. Tiffany travelled there be-
cause throughout her life so many people had asked her: *Where are your origins? What
are your roots?* She therefore felt impelled to go and 'find her roots'. She showed us a
photo from the island where she had been: 'I can already tell you that I did not feel
totally at home there, but well...', she tells the audience without going into further
detail. It seems people in the audience know what she means as you can see many
nodding heads. In her paper 'Black Microtales: Recreating Memories of a Bubi Afro-
Galician Using the Visual Arts', the PhD candidate in Architecture and Education ex-
plains the stages she went through while dealing with her African descent in Spain.
Tiffany talks about experiences of racism and being racialised while growing up. She
remembers looking at a class picture and realising that she was the only brown girl.
She remembers dancing a Galician traditional dance, how it felt completely natu-
ral to her because she was Galician, but how she was confronted with being seen as
exotic by others who looked at her performance.

Today she reflects on these experiences as instances of racialisation, of being
othered. Then Tiffany narrates the importance of finding relief as a young adult
in a community of other Spanish Afrodescendant young women and becoming a
member of an Afro-Galician collective. It was there that Tiffany could forge her own
Afrodescendant identity in a positive way, feeling connected to others, sharing a
racialised subject position in Spain with others who were also Black in Spain or
Black and Spanish – with Black here referring to a shared experience and conscience
of racial discrimination. After this Tiffany moves to another stage of her life, it is
the stage that she is in at that moment as an adult woman, as she turns to her own
personal Bubi family heritage, originating on an island in Equatorial Guinea, and
a former Spanish colony (1778–1968). This is the land her mother, who migrated to
Spain many years ago, comes from.

Through her photo collages (see Fig. 1), which she labels 'Autoethnographic mi-
crotales' (2017) in a published paper of hers, we can follow her life story. A thread run-
ning through her narrative is the care she takes combing her hair and how she uses
the time spent on this task to reflect on her life – how with time, hatred of her Afro
hair gradually changed to love – an important topic in Afrodiasporic movements
around the world, where Afro hair has political connotations. In the collage we see
an old class picture in which Tiffany is a young child, it marks her experience of being

'*la unica marron*' (the only brown person) (López Ganet 2017, p. 142) in her class. Then we see the face of her mother next to a man wearing blackface – it marks her mother experiencing being 'mistaken' by children for the daughter of Balthazar, one of the Magi or Three Kings in the Christian nativity story. We also see the author in front a mirror as a little girl – this refers to her wish to have straight hair like the other kids. Then we see her sitting with her Equatorial Guinean grandfather in a festive costume, and standing with her mother against the background of a Bubi village. In the final picture, we see Tiffany combing her hair. The combing of her hair becomes the arc for her personal narration of self; she finally learned to deal positively with being of mixed Bubi-Galician heritage and with being an Afrodescendant woman in Spain.

Figure 1: Collage and self-portrait, 2017 © Tiffany López Ganet

After Tiffany's presentation, Mélanie P., herself a Swiss person of African descent, thanks her and remarks that many things resonated with her own experiences of growing up in Switzerland – she can identify with her in many ways.

Vignette 2: On life-story sharing at the Afroeuropeans conference, Lisbon, July 2019

My intention in going to the conference is also to present my ongoing PhD research on Afrodiasporic identities in Germany, in which I use a life-story approach. I present one such story at a panel. It is the story of Aminata, a German-Guinean woman and friend of mine raised in Frankfurt in the 1980s and the life story of her father Lamine Camara, who came to Germany in the 1970s on a student scholarship from Guinea. I relate how Aminata told me about her life; how she went through different stages of dealing with her African descent (more of her story features in the next chapters); how she lived in Guinea for a few years with her Guinean father and German mother as a child, feeling more like a German expat than a Guinean repatriate; how she turned to Black American culture for identification as

a teenager as a way to define her African descent other than through her Guinean father and how today, as an adult woman with children of her own, Aminata is again seeking to learn more about her West African and Guinean origins and include this understanding in her everyday life.

After my presentation, I take a question from a young Portuguese Afrodescendant woman, she must be in her late twenties or early thirties. She wonders if I am planning to make a model out of the case that I presented. 'A model…?' I ask. The young woman goes on to specify that the process I describe for Aminata resonated with her own experiences. Being Portuguese, she did not grow up in Germany like Aminata, but she too had a father who emigrated from an African country and also grew up heavily influenced by Black American culture in her self-identity as a teenager. Moreover, as an adult woman today, she too has begun to deal more consciously with her African heritage and family history.

Problem statement and research questions

The biographies of young women and men of African descent presented at the various panels using diverse artistic and academic means at the Afroeuropeans conference in Lisbon – although being different in many personal or social and cultural aspects – also have certain aspects in common: Most of them grew up in the 1980s as children of African migrants and are thus part of the so-called second generation; as it is an academic conference, they are highly educated and mostly belong to an urban middle class. Many of them have experiences of being 'migrantised',[2] a term used by the German historian Fatima El-Tayeb (2016). Migrantisation in this sense means the act of treating people with a non-European background as eternal newcomers in public discourse – no matter how many generations they have already been living in a country.[3] The women grew up in surroundings where they were perceived as different from the norm of what it meant to be Spanish or Galician, German, French, Swiss or Portuguese, because they were perceived as not white. They were influenced by African American cultural production in their personal identification as Black people when they were teenagers. Many began to search for collectives formed by people of African descent with whom they could share their experiences of racialisation and racism. And, last but not least, many began to engage with

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2   The original German term is *Migrantisierung*.

3   This process is well exemplified in the practice of naming children of non-European migrants 'second generation migrant'. It is a form of racialisation, because it applies mostly to people who are considered as non-white. The term racialisation refers to the process of constructing differences between people based on phenotype but without the hierarchical judgement that is inherent in racism (Guillaumin 1972).

their own particular African origins and the search for family history by travelling to their parents' countries of origin or countries with which they felt a sense of cultural closeness when they were adults.

The two vignettes this book begins with speak to the role of life storytelling and sharing in constructing Afrodiasporic identities, which is what my work is about. It is specifically about the making of diasporic identities for young middle-class Afrodescendant women in Germany. Both vignettes speak to an intersubjective construction of self: how others can identify with the stories we tell. In the first vignette, Tiffany Lopez Ganet described different stages of dealing with her Afrodiasporic heritage, and they resonated with other scholars of African descent at the conference – especially with the younger generation. In the second vignette, the story I presented of Aminata and her father was a stimulus for the young Portuguese woman to think about her own life. She saw similarities between herself and Aminata.

I am very glad to have had that young woman tell me how she could relate to the story of Aminata. I informed her that, although I was not planning on defining a model, I was indeed interested in researching the connection that she felt. The reason I do not want to define a model is because a model is a rigid and predictive construction which tries to take the personal out of the equation; my take on researching Afrodiasporic identity constructions is more dialogical and personal. However, I am still interested in looking at differences, similarities and patterns that do emerge in the life stories I analyse. What I want to describe are the processes that make it possible for a person to identify with others from the same generation across different countries and continents. I seek to explain the process that leads an Afrodescendant person to identify with other Afrodescendant people in Europe; to analyse the common mechanisms of construction of self that result from shared experiences. I do not want to stop at the single story but to draw comparisons and explore larger connections. My rejection of the possibility, put to me in a question, that I was constructing a model is typical of anthropologists, who focus on the particular. In anthropology we do not do models, I thought. We illustrate complex realities and never take the subject(ive) out of the analysis. Yet this is not completely true. I do seek to objectify subjective reality by trying to understand under what circumstances (personal and structural) a subjective understanding and construction of self emerges and how it relates to others: Ethnographic work should create a ground for comparison and should contribute to answering the question of how the particular, the unique, speaks to the general. Webb Keane calls for a 'productive understanding of objectification' (2003, p. 223) when criticising recent anthropology for favouring epistemologies of intimacy, rather than estrangement, as sources of understanding. He contends that an epistemology of intimacy is crucial for ethnographic fieldwork, essential to capture local meaning, but also asserts that, for understanding individual experiences, 'the estrangement' or analytical distance that follows fieldwork is as crucial.

Keane suggests that even self-interpretation does not stick to the particular; the very action of self-interpretation already assumes some ability to self-objectify. Objectification in that sense relates to the ability to see your own experience as relatable to and co-dependent on others – as intersubjective.

The book engages with the lives of five women of African descent in Germany, who were all born in the 1980s and are children of migrant parents. Through their life stories, it explores experiences of growing up in a German city and follows the relations they built to their respective places of ancestral origin. In the cases of the women I follow for my work, hearing and reading about the lives of other women of African descent helped them to de-singularise their own experiences. One important part of their life stories are experiences of travelling to ancestral homelands – where 'origins' are not necessarily the places of origin of their parents but closely related; these experiences are connected to their coming of age as Afrodescendant people in Germany. This book examines how practices of kinship, storytelling and travelling contribute to self-construction and the creation of belonging to Afrodiasporic communities. It shows how becoming part of different communities (transnational families, political networks), sharing experiences and dealing with personal family histories of migration plays a role in the women's understanding of self as young middle-class German women of African descent.

The questions my work poses are: How are diasporic identities formed by people of the second generation, children of African migrants who grew up in a German city (Frankfurt)? What is the role of the country of parental origin in the lives of these women, how does it evolve and change throughout the course of their life, and how is the practice of travelling to one's 'origins' related to the construction of diasporic identity? And, last but not least, what is the role of life storytelling for the construction of self and community?

In examining the diasporic identity-building processes of the women, this book emphasises their socioeconomic conditions, taking the intersection of race/racialisation, gender and class as the basis for analysing their accounts and experiences. The additional dimension of kinship also emerged as important on two levels for studying the creation of African diasporic identities: In terms of both the individual and intimate making of diasporic identity by engaging in transnational family life and history, including travelling to origins, and in the form of the collective creation of diaspora communities through coalitions in Black (feminist) political communities where life stories are used as vehicles to convey a sense of community and 'chosen family' (Weston 1997). These identity-building processes are examined through three spatial scales: the local/national – looking at how the women grew up in the German city of Frankfurt; the transnational – focussing on the construction of transnational family ties in the African countries of ancestral origin; and the global – considering the connections with globally entangled African diaspora communities.

The aim of this work is to contribute not only to the presentation of life stories but also to the analysis of how stories of a life can reveal identity-building processes, how they are used to create a coherent self and to connect with others. The person-centred approach of following the lives of five women in depth allows me to delve into the everyday practices and understandings of these women's self-fashioning and to learn about their relations to parents, extended kin and friends. The fact that I have known two of the women since we were children in school allowed for an in-depth understanding and situating of their lives. It also let me examine their situated understandings and presentations of self – in forums ranging from public events and conferences, to everyday conversations and experiences. The five women I worked with for the research all have academic degrees and are experienced in reflecting and talking about their lives and selves. Such an intimate methodology also facilitates analysis of how identifying as Afrodescendant is just one part of an understanding of selfhood that intersects with other selfhood markers such as gender and class.

Working with women

The study centres on women for three reasons: One is simply that I activated my circle of intimate friends in Frankfurt, which happens mainly to be female. I chose to include two women I went to school with and have known for almost all my life. It is through them and through our shared history that I was able to reconstruct what it was like to grow up in Frankfurt. Many of the results that I present in my thesis are the product of intimate conversations where they narrate their biographies and travel experiences. In some of these remembered moments I was there with them, in others this was not the case. It is especially our shared teenage years that bind us together to this day and which gave me the curiosity to explore further this crucial time in their lives and the significance of growing up as a woman of African descent. In particular, I am intrigued by the role of the particular 'geography of Blackness' of the city of Frankfurt, which was influenced by the presence of US troops and their entertainment infrastructure in and around the city and which we were part of.

The second reason that I focused on women is because I collected data at Black political network meetings at international conferences and these networks often have a feminist history and background. In these networks most (though not all) of the members are female.

And third, and finally, there are analytical reasons why I work with women: There is a gender component to my work because there are particularities about growing up as a woman of African descent – these particularly concern *techniques of the body*, a concept Marcel Mauss described in 1936. Thus, I explore how women who have been racialised learn to use their bodies in specific ways – how they move, feel and are affected by the gaze and actions of others at different times of their lives. And how they learn to take care of their bodies or to see and use their bodies differently by turning

to Black feminism. The most striking use is certainly hair and hairstyle, the use of the Afro and braids as a Black feminist symbol. Learning to take care of their curly hair and thinking critically about the use of chemical relaxer is a learning experience most of my interlocutors have gone through, and there are certain techniques and products that are associated with it – as Tiffany López Ganet explains in the first vignette: Learning to care for her hair has been about learning self-care too. This connection between body, care and politics will be explored through various examples throughout the life stories of my interlocutors.

The practice of travelling is also crucial as it facilitates a focus on the embodied experiences of the women. Being and living in the places they relate to via ancestral origins makes them experience their bodies in different ways, as well as experience different gender norms. This is why I chose to work with an intersectional approach (see below, section on 'Analytical approaches') that takes race/ethnicity, class and gender into account in the analysis of these women's lives.[4]

In my work, I have traced in depth the lives of six women, most of whom were born in the 1980s; five of them appear in this book. I will now briefly introduce the women and their families,[5] the main characters in this study. While writing my thesis, I asked my partner if he would draw my research interlocutors. Drawings have the advantage of being more anonymous than photography (in drawings you can play more with the features of a person to make them a bit less recognizable), yet they are still very intimate, as the person who draws is trying to capture a unique facial expression and indications of personality. The drawings I asked my partner to do are also meant as a homage to the women and as a sign of respect and gratitude for their collaboration. Mostly they underline that this work is based on intimate relations that I was able to rely on as well as to build further during the PhD process.

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4   Although the people I follow in depth are all women, men are not excluded from the study, as they are often an essential part of the lives of the women and appear as life-partners, fathers, sons and brothers.

5   For the sake of anonymity, I have changed almost all names of the people appearing in this thesis except for Oxana Chi, Layla Zami and Lamine Camara as it was important to them to be included with their names.

Aminata Camara

Figure 2: Aminata, 2020 © Christophe Schwartz

Aminata is an old friend from school in Frankfurt, the city where we both grew up. She was born in the 1980s and has two young children with her husband Albert. His parents are from Ghana, and he was born in Frankfurt. Aminata's father migrated from Guinea to Germany in the 1970s on a student scholarship; her mother is from Frankfurt and studied there in the 1970s too. Today, Aminata's mother works for a development cooperation agency and her father is a retired business consultant. They all live in Frankfurt. Aminata was actually born in Colombia, when her mother went there as part of an academic exchange programme for two years to teach German, where she was accompanied by her father. Soon after returning to Frankfurt, the family relocated to Conakry, Guinea, in the 1990s. They went back to Frankfurt again when Aminata was ten and was soon to enter high school, which is when we met and became friends. After finishing school,[6] Aminata studied French, Culture and Economics in Mannheim and today works as an independent media and public relations agent and does a lot of work as a moderator for events for and put on by Black people and People of Colour in Frankfurt, as well as for migrant organisations. For a few years Aminata has been co-organiser of the Afrika-Fest in Frankfurt.

Maya B.

Maya was born in the 1980s in Frankfurt. After finishing high school she studied tourism and urban planning, taking part in an exchange programme with a university in Kenya. Maya's father is from Sierra Leone and her mother from close to Frankfurt. Today her family is transnationally dispersed: Her mother lives in Germany,

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6   With the *Abitur* qualification, the holder is entitled to attend university.

her father in Sierra Leone, her younger brother in the USA. She is in regular contact with her brother and father via phone. Maya's husband Otis is from Frankfurt. His mother is German and his father is African American. They both work for a big development cooperation agency. In 2018 they moved to Nigeria for work and because Maya wanted to try out living in West Africa, but they kept their flat in Frankfurt. In 2019, Maya came back to Frankfurt to give birth to her first child.

Lafia T.

Figure 3: Lafia, 2020 © Christophe Schwartz

Lafia was born in Heidelberg in 1986 but moved to Frankfurt when she was little. Her father is from Senegal and her mother is German. In Frankfurt I only knew her by sight – Lafia is a friend of friends and we made contact via Facebook. She has two children and is married to David, an Irish-German from Frankfurt. Lafia grew up with her mother and visited her father regularly. He lived in Heidelberg with his second wife and one son, Lafia's half-brother. Today, Lafia is a writer and a trained psychotherapist for children and teenagers. She is pursuing a PhD in educational sciences and holds a teaching position in psychology at the Goethe University of Frankfurt. Lafia's mother is from a small German town; she moved to Heidelberg as a young adult, inspired by the 1968 generation. She met Lafia's father through friends in her left-wing liberal circle. He had come to Heidelberg on a student scholarship and was studying economics. When Lafia was little, her mother moved to Frankfurt for a job while her father stayed in Heidelberg. Her father unfortunately died in 2018 in Senegal. A few months earlier Lafia had visited Senegal for the first time with him and he had stayed on after her visit.

Oxana Chi and Layla Zami

Figure 4: Oxana Chi and Layla Zami, 2020 © Christophe Schwartz

I met the married couple Oxana and Layla in Tampere, Finland at the Afroeu-ropeans conference 'Black cultures and identities in Europe' in 2017.[7] Oxana is a dancer, choreographer, filmmaker, writer and Afro-feminist activist in her fifties. Her father is from Nigeria. Her mother is German. Oxana was born in Frankfurt and grew up in Bochum, where she went to a Waldorf school, a private alternative school usually associated with alternative left-liberal circles. Layla was born in Paris in 1985. She is a teaching scholar, musician, poet and filmmaker. Layla wrote a PhD in Gender Studies about diaspora and dance. She has German Jewish grandparents; her father is French-German Jewish, and her mother is from Martinique and lives in France. Layla lived in Berlin for many years during her childhood and moved there again in her twenties.

Oxana and Layla met in Berlin at one of Oxana's performances. Today, they travel and perform together and both are active in Black and feminist networks. Oxana and Layla generally live between New York and Berlin and travel a lot for their work and artist/research residencies. The performances usually include themes related to the African diaspora, exile and feminism. I went to conferences in Cannes and Toronto with Oxana and Layla, when they were invited as keynote performers, and visited them in their homes in Berlin (2017) and New York (where they were based between 2018 and 2022).

Nina M.

Nina does not feature in this book because I chose to focus only on women who grew up in Germany so as to capture specific racialisation processes and experiences of

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7   Oxana Chi's website is oxanachi.de and Layla Zami's is laylazami.net.

racialisation and racism for children of the second generation who grew up in Germany. I have decided to mention her here nonetheless in order to show that even if she does not feature in the text directly, she has informed much of my thinking. Nina was born and grew up in Uganda in the 1980s. She has lived in Wuppertal for more than ten years now after originally moving there as an au pair. She is currently finishing her PhD in English studies on Black British literature. She has a blog called *The Afrodiasporan*, which she started after arriving in Germany.[8] I met Nina at the conference in Tampere, where she presented herself as 'somehow Afro-German'. After that I met her again at a summer school in Frankfurt and conducted a life-story interview with her in Wuppertal soon after. In 2018, we went to a Black travel symposium together and explored the city of Brussels. My encounter with Nina was very important because it was particularly through discussions with her that I started to think more about class and education when researching Black and Afrodiasporic identities. She also sparked off a lot of ideas for research on the generational question. Nina has a great deal in common with the other women in this study; although she grew up in Uganda, she shares many cultural references when it comes to Afrodiasporic cultural production, and especially media production. I wrote a fieldnote for the anthropological blog *Allegralab* in which she features (Wojczewski 2019).

Life-stories and anthropology: Between method and object of study

In this section I will outline the main methodology used in my thesis: reflecting on the role that life stories and family ethnographies have in the discipline of anthropology and their importance for my fieldwork, as well as considering the life story as object of study in itself. I will also outline how I analyse the life stories. In addition, I reflect on the themes of the fieldwork both 'at home' and 'on the move' in a subsection on positionality.

Although at the outset, life-story narration was only supposed to be a method for recording ethnographic data, it soon emerged as a central theoretical component of the research itself, once I found that it had an important place at Black identity events and for the construction of activist identities. Hence, in my research the life story is more than just a means to an end. I do not only use the life story as a method to research a particular problem but also examine the importance that it has in and of itself in the construction of self and community. I present and examine the life stories of the women I work with and at the same time I look at how they use stories of their lives and stories about travelling in everyday situations and at events and conferences and how this creates a dialogue.

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8   Nina's blog is at www.afro-diasporan.com.

The biographical or life-story approach is an essential part of my fieldwork; I collected life-story material from my research participants during fieldwork at home as well as while on the move. This material came in various forms: In many cases, I conducted biographical interviews, holding between one and three sessions and recording the results. This was the case for Aminata, Oxana, Layla and Lafia, and the results were very diverse, ranging from intimate conversations to more distant interviews where I felt that the interviewees were rather following a script. Often the interviews were a mix of biography and recollections of travel experiences at different points in their life.

The interviews were certainly all very different. Lafia, for example, asked if she should talk about her life in relation to being Afro-German. Yet since the question came from her, and because my idea of the interview was that she could tell me whatever she wanted to in that moment, I indicated that she should just tell me about growing up. With Aminata, the prompt 'So, tell me about your life' was all that was required. My discussions with Oxana and Layla revolved more around their travel experiences and how these were linked to their lives.

Interviewing was only one method of research. I also observed how life stories unfolded directly on various occasions during fieldwork. These included stage performances by Oxana and Layla as well as many informal conversations with Maya, Lafia and Aminata. Besides biographical interviews, I also conducted several interviews on travel experiences – travels that my participants perceived as existentially important to them and important in shaping their lives in various ways.

Although it is not the most common method, anthropology has a long tradition of using life stories to illustrate how life is lived and perceived in a certain time and place. These biographical narratives have the power to illustrate both the possibilities and limits that a person has as an agent in various organisations (family, the state, the system of production) and shows how they negotiate belonging to these different groups, taking into account a larger historical context. The autobiographical accounts are not objective illustrations of facts; they are experiences turned into memories and shaped to make sense and to present a coherent version of self (Linde 1993). The anthropologist Annika Lems, who used the method of life story in her work writes that 'life stories focus on the cultural scripts and narrative devices that individuals use to make sense of experience' (2018, p. 43). Through telling the stories of particular individuals – or rather, letting them tell their stories – showing a specific lifeworld and specific practices, ethnography seeks to demonstrate how the meaning of the world and of the self is produced by a person.

The use of life stories has a particularly long tradition in the anthropology of women and feminist anthropology (Birx 2006, Hopkins 2001). It started with Marjorie Shostak's classic *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (1981). Shostak includes many transcripts of the life story told by Nisa in her own words. These direct citations alternate with Shostak's own introductions of given aspects of !Kung life.

The two voices remain separate in this ethnography. This is not the same in other examples: Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman* (1993) and Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (1991) also focus on the life of one particular woman in their participatory fieldwork. In those ethnographies, the authors place a particular importance on the relation between themselves and their main characters and reflect upon their own role in the field while also giving space to the voice of their interlocutors. The relationship and the auto-ethnography are included as organic parts of these books. It is this possibility of including the dialogue and relationship between interlocutor and researcher that motivated me to use the life story as a method.

Other ethnographies utilise the life story as well. They include Sidney Mintz's *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History* (1974), Gananath Obeyesekere's *Medusa's Hair* (1984) and Lila Abu-Lughod's *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (2008 [1993]). These works focus on the lifeworlds of particular subjectivities to demonstrate how people not only negotiate, embody and challenge a range of identities and cultural symbols through their engagement and relations with the world and the people surrounding them, and how positions evolve over a lifetime; they show how people cope with certain social and economic developments depending, for instance, on their class and gender. Another aspect that most life-story ethnographies have in common is that the researchers have already known their interlocutor(s) for many years and have engaged in previous fieldwork with them. In my case this is even more pronounced: I have known some of the women I work with since childhood, which allowed for a very intimate and in-depth portrait of their lives. While most ethnographers use the life story as a method, they do not analyse the function it has for the person telling it, which is one important focus of my work.

The important dimensions for the analysis of life stories in this work are temporality and rupture in the accounts as well as self-interpretation with the help of fiction and the sharing of stories, which allow the women to identify with a larger Afrodiasporic culture. These two dimensions are important for understanding how my interlocutors make sense of their African heritage as part of themselves.

How can life stories include both the idea of a dynamic self and of a stable one? I analyse how life stories are used to create identity in the sense of Ricœur's narrative identity (1988). He argues that the act of narrating a life or life events mediates the knowledge of oneself to the self and to others and is thus a way to mediate and interpret experience. The individual does not know their own self as such, s/he has to use resources to interpret and mediate it for herself and for others. Ricœur's two conceptions of identity, which suggest a certain permanence in time of the self – identity as *idem* and identity as *ipse* – are brought together dynamically in the form of narrative identity. Identity-idem refers to the character of a person that is perceived as stable trait of self, while nonetheless being the fruit of history; while identity-ipse refers to an awareness of change in time but with an effort to stay the same.

For Ricœur, the narration of identity allows the combination of both dimensions of identity – the stable and the dynamic dimensions. It includes different stages and experiences of life and brings contradictions and change together in a single narration of self. In the case of my research here, narrative identity is an important concept because it focuses on how, through narration, self-identity is created but also on how identification with others – the construction of community – becomes possible through narration and the interplay between listening to and telling life stories. It is not the life history – a factual account of someone's life – that I am interested in, but how people put their experiences into stories in order to interpret who they are or were. The life stories of my interlocutors reveal the tensions between permanence and change, especially with regard to growing up in Germany as people of African descent. The othering they had to deal with in the society in which they were socialised led to specific forms of engagement with their African heritage during the various stages of their lives. Temporality is one means of connecting continuity and change in a single narrative strand. The temporal dimension in the life story, according to linguistic anthropologists Elinor Ochs and Lisa Kapps (1996), focuses on the transition from one stage to another and looks at how past, present and future become connected. Consider, for example, the life stories I presented in the two vignettes at the beginning of this book: The stories relate to past events, yet through performance at the conference they are connected to the present, mediated by the teller and a listening audience. The function of telling stories of the past is to make sense of the present and to construct the future, as one aim of the telling is to build Black communities through the sharing of experiences.

In my analysis, I draw particular attention to the importance of anticipated or unexpected 'turns of events' (Ochs and Kapps 1996, p. 27). Travel experiences are often described as such turning points in the lives of the women and for their construction of diasporic identities, especially through meeting with transnational kin.

The other key aspect of analysis is how these personal stories are inspired by history and fiction, and the ways in which these help to shape understandings of self. Ochs and Kapps suggest that knowledge of self becomes possible indirectly, through the use of cultural signs and symbols – tools that help a person make sense of their existence. How do the women in my research make use of history, fiction and other people's stories to make sense of their lives? And how does this help them to relate to a larger Afro-diasporic culture?

In their life narratives, the women become a kind of fictional character not only because they narrate themselves, but even more than that, because in order to understand their lives, the women refer to many African American cultural symbols, and use fictional characters from African and African American authors or other people's biographies to interpret their experiences. The narration of (parts of) their lives helps them make sense of transformations and change, and reveals how ruptures, contradictions and tensions are also part of a single life.

The purpose of telling stories about one's life to others and to oneself is to create coherence over an existence which is full of contradictions, coincidences and things that might not easily make sense. It can help create a sense of a coherent self or bring coherence into the events of one's life (Bourdieu 1986b, Linde 1993). The life stories that I heard were sometimes rather elaborate, as was often the case when someone was already used to telling (parts of) her biography because she was active in Black identity movements. The women would not always narrate their whole biography but rather bits and pieces to different people in different situations. On other occasions, I heard life stories that were less clearly developed and evolved. In these cases there were more moments where contradictions and conflicts evolved in the narrative spontaneously and were dealt with ad hoc by the person telling her story. It was never told in a coherent way from beginning to end, but the women always chose to draw connections between past and present; they talked of a past event and thought about it in light of the present. For example, when Aminata told me about school, she also reflected upon her experiences with the 'racial lens' she had developed as an adult. And sometimes, when she would talk about herself as a child, she would make a loop to her own daughter and reflect on her life.

Yet life stories are not only found in individual life-story ethnographies, they matter in many different ethnographies and notably in family ethnographies.

Family ethnographies

I have also sought to include the perspective of my participants' parents and was able to interview Aminata's father, Lamine Camara, in Frankfurt. Our conversation provides a good frame for the exploration of African diaspora throughout generations in a family (see Chapter 4 'Family affairs'). The interview with Aminata's father added a new dimension to my work. It gave insights into the history of African student migration to Germany after 1945 and how it was connected to the 1968 student protests in Germany. It also added the perspective of how a person who actually migrated developed a new relation to his country of origin. This interview shows how Lamine Camara deals with questions of national and diasporic belonging in relation to his children who were born in Germany. In the biographical interviews of the women in this study, the parents or the necessity to speak about one's parents is an important concern. On becoming adults, the wish to understand where the parents come from, the often difficult though loving relationships they have or had with their parents and the wish to build a connection to their countries of ancestral origin became increasingly pertinent. Lafia informed me that the migration history of her father and his country of origin, Senegal, began to be a matter of interest to her only when she became an adult herself, and that 'at a certain point after I started working in a migration project I realised that he must feel homesick from time to time'. Family also becomes important for my interlocutors when they have founded families

of their own. The fact of having children themselves and being confronted with the question of what they want to transmit to them culturally and politically also makes them deal more empathically with their own parents.

Including the family histories of my interlocutors responds to the idea already posited by migration scholars such as Abdelmalek Sayad (1979) and Stéphane Beaud (2018) that a family history of migration does not start or end with the arrival of a migrant in another country. There is a before and an after, too.

As long ago as the 1970s, the sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad brought a consideration of family and an intergenerational aspect to the study of international migration when researching Algerian immigration to France from the 1950s onwards and the different generations of descendants of migrants (2006 [1979]). Sayad uses an in-depth biographical interview of Zahoua, the daughter of a couple who came to France from Algeria in the 1950s. It is only after their conversation that he adds his analysis and some context. The contextualisation is supposed to give the reader the chance to understand and objectify to a certain extent the subjective account of Zahoua's life – to place it in a wider context.

A sort of continuation of Sayad's work can be found in the family ethnography of Stéphane Beaud, who in *La France des Belhoumi* (2018) writes with and about a family of Algerian origin in France, painting the portraits of three generations in France following the father's arrival in 1971. The anthropologist also gives a lot of space to the narratives of his interlocutors, especially the daughters of the Belhoumi family, the second generation in France, and less to the analysis of the accounts. Much like in the ethnographies of Behar or McCarthy Brown, the relation between researcher and family members is prominent in the works of Beaud and Sayad. Beaud often refers to conversations he had with the daughters of the family, how they exchanged text messages and newspaper articles, which gives clues about how much Beaud was able to learn from this very participatory approach with the Belhoumi family.

One of the reasons I chose to engage with life stories and family ethnographies is that it allows room to contextualise and reflect upon the relation between researcher and interlocutor, while also giving the interlocutors' voices time and space to develop. Yet I opted to take a somewhat more interventionist approach to the narratives of my interlocutors. I chose certain citations to discuss, brought up particular themes and circumstances in order to draw comparisons or to add a personal description. Description, analysis and context are connected in my work. Nonetheless, I also leave space for some stories to develop in their own rhythm and only intervene afterwards. Sometimes a direct citation is only a catalyst to discussing a broader situation. Bourdieu calls for an embeddedness of life histories or biographies in a broader context, as only that context makes it possible to give sense to the narrative itself (1986b). The context in which the interview took place is also relevant. Where was it, who was there, who spoke? What sort of relation is there between interviewer and interviewee? The interview situations were a common experience between me

and my interlocutors in which, by posing questions about their life, I tried to support a potential for self-analysis and hence a potential for objectification of self-experience. But it is important to keep in mind that this self-analysis is limited to the point that it is still a performance towards me as interviewer/friend with a recording device (in many cases) and that some insights might not be shared with me (especially when the recording device is on).

Most of the people I write about are in their thirties and fourties and have begun to found their own families – whether with or without children. Many of the discussions and interviews I had with them included reflections about their parents or about themselves as parents – as if the process of coming of age and of feeling that they reached adulthood brought about the need to reflect upon their parent's lives and sensibilities. In my research, which focuses on the topic of being of African descent, these reflections tend to turn around their African parent, most often their father, but their mothers are no less important in their reflections. In the cases of Aminata, Maya and Lafia (my research participants from Frankfurt), the relationships with their fathers during their teens were difficult and a refusal to deal with that relationship in the past has turned to a wish to reflect and engage with it as an adult. Yet the family ethnography that I propose goes beyond immediate kin. It includes transnational family relations and the challenges and opportunities they pose for the diasporic identities of the women. It follows the efforts, challenges and tensions of my interlocutors to become truly part of transnational families and to transform distant kin into family.

Positionality: Fieldwork 'at home' and 'on the move'

The life-story or biographical method is used frequently in the anthropology of travel and tourism, yet usually travel itself is at the centre of the research, as the researcher tries to encounter the person during their travels (Picard 2013, Leite 2017, Simoni 2018, Harrison 2003). I decided rather to place an emphasis on the home context, to really understand where the people are coming from and how their diasporic travels are a small piece in the bigger picture of their lives; being able to engage with my interlocutors over the long term was an advantage in that regard. First, exploring their home lives placed the diasporic travels of my interlocutors in a wider context – showing how they are connected not only to the pasts of these women, but also to their future plans and endeavours. Second, it revealed how these journeys are not only an important objective in themselves but also enabled new relationships to emerge and transformed existing ones at home.

Travel opens up new paths. For me, as an author, researcher and friend, the desire to reflect on personal history was something that drove me to include Frankfurt – the city where I grew up – in my work; my research is therefore in many ways an 'intimate ethnography' (Waterston 2019, p. 10) of a native anthropologist. I decided

to include close friends in the research so that we could reflect and analyse together how the city and our upbringing shaped us, but more specifically how it shaped the Afrodiasporic identification processes of my interlocutors. In this way, I was able to draw on more than 20 years of friendship and living in Frankfurt together. For my six months of fieldwork in Frankfurt in 2017/18, I tried to 'transform home into a field of study' (2000, p. 34) as Noel Dyck expounds in his essay 'Home field advantage?' Exploring the ways in which Frankfurt is and is not my home is important in order to explain my own position in the field. Frankfurt is my home in the first place because there are people there with whom I have shared intimate relationships over a long period of time, my family and friends. Peter Manning (1987) explains that there are two strategies for doing ethnographic fieldwork: Either you go into a field that is totally strange to you and try to make it familiar or you go into a field you suppose is familiar and try to make it strange again. The anthropologist Florence Weber has called the two types 'investigation through distantiation' and 'investigation through familiarisation' (Beaud and Weber 2003). The first field (the strange one) is well represented by the Malinowskian tradition of fieldwork and the social anthropological tradition, while for the second (the familiar field), the works of members of the Chicago school of urban sociology are a good example. All those researchers chose familiar surroundings of a sort, usually an urban setting, but still entered an unknown world within this familiar setting. The study by William F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society* (1943), is one early example of this approach, in which he undertakes lengthy ethnographic research in an Italian neighbourhood of Boston, Massachusetts. In a way, he was at home, if you consider his home to be an urban environment on the east coast of the USA. However, in many regards the field was unfamiliar to him, and he was not a part of the group he studied. He was still mostly an outsider in his field and needed to become familiar with the people and the neighbourhood he was studying.

Then there are other examples of researchers who went back to their native places to study a milieu that they had left and where a large social distance had grown between them and their birthplace. They had formerly been insiders in the milieu they studied. For instance, bell hooks studied the importance of class within families in her book *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000) and described how it was for her to grow up in a Black working-class family and later engage in class mobility by means of higher education, becoming a university lecturer. More recently, Didier Eribon explored and reflected very personally on the habitus of the white working class in France in his own family in *Retour à Reims* (2009). These authors returned to their origins long after a distance had been created by social mobility enabled by higher education. They had, in one way or another, cut the ties to their working-class origins and returned more as outsiders than insiders. But they also explore how these class origins (intersecting with gender and race) influenced their social mobility and their lives in their academic milieus.

I am much more of an insider to my field. I never cut the ties to my milieu of origin, and there is no social distance between me and the people I studied – only a geographical one, because I moved away at the age of 19. For my fieldwork, I went back to an urban, highly educated, middle-class milieu, where I still have friends and family with whom I share this milieu today. Hence, I needed to practise distanciation in this milieu that was very familiar to me, to reflect on my position while growing up and consider how it was different and not so different from the women in my study.

So, I grew up in Frankfurt, which is a very multicultural city, and ever since I was a child ethnic and cultural diversity have been a normal part of my life. I often did not even consider whether my life and experiences were different to those of my friends who were seen as People of Colour; for me, we all seemed equal. But, as a teenager, I began to understand that there were experiences in the lives of my friends who had, for example, a Guinean or a Turkish parent that made us different. These were experiences of racialisation and othering,[9] as well as a fear of outright racism. The intersection of racism and sexism was a constant companion in their lives. We shared many things growing up as part of the same generation in rather middle-class urban surroundings, but what did the different subject positions resulting from racialisation mean for our individual lives and relations? Because of these experiences of growing up together yet being different, I first began to be interested in the history and theories of racism, politics of anti-racism, and categories of difference and intersectionality.

But I also needed to familiarise myself with a milieu I did not know: the Afrodiasporic and Black organisations in Frankfurt and Germany in general. This led me to get to know Frankfurt in new ways. I met and interviewed new people and people whom I knew only by sight as a teenager and young adult. I got to know new places too, such as the city archives, to find out more about the history of migration in Frankfurt, went to meetings of the Afro-German Graduate Network (ADAN[10]) and spent time at the new campus of the Goethe University. I also chose to not stay at my parents' house while doing fieldwork in Frankfurt, as I felt it was impossible to put myself into an independent working mood if my parents were waiting for me for dinner every night. So I lived with an old friend who had a spare room, which was a lucky coincidence for me, as she and I would regularly exchange thoughts on my research.

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9   Othering refers to a discursive practice of marking a person as different from a supposed collective or of marking boundaries between a self and other, which in this case would be 'the Germans' who are imagined as an ethnocultural collective which excludes People of Colour, who are marked as other based on descent, phenotype or religious affiliation (see for example Schneider et al. 2012, p. 291).

10   ADAN's website is at https://ada-netzwerk.com (accessed 23 November 2020).

Constructing the field at home requires to a certain degree making that home 'unknown, unfamiliar, unusual and challenging' (Dyck 2000, p. 36). I can say that Frankfurt as a research site did indeed become that for me. I hadn't lived there for more than 15 years when I left at the age of 19, just starting to get a very blurry feeling of what it meant to be an adult, and came back as a person who had constructed her life and career elsewhere in Europe. Hence, although Frankfurt was the place I had been socialised in, it felt unfamiliar, and I had to rediscover the city as a thirty-something. Also totally unfamiliar were, of course, the new terms of relationship that I applied to my old friends/new research participants. We not only scheduled private meetings now but also more professional meetings where, for the first time in our lives, I would switch on the recording device to do a formal interview. That definitely felt strange.

In every case and at all times, I informed my friends and participants that I was conducting fieldwork, but it was easier to be aware of this working relationship in the cases of Layla, Oxana, Nina and Lafia, who I had met through the research context, than for Maya and Aminata, who I had known for more than twenty years. They were aware of my research when I pulled out my voice recorder or when I started writing down notes on my phone, but I think they were less aware of being the focus of my enquiry on other occasions. To manage informed consent and research ethics around researching long-term friends, I differentiated between private and professional meetings – for example, an interview would be considered a professional meeting. Nonetheless, as I have known them for a long time, my analysis of their accounts is significantly informed by the private time we spent together, too – the boundaries are blurred. In my writing I try to not disclose too many details of their private lives and consciously avoid going into detail about certain aspects. And right up to the end of the research process, I applied the mantra that their consent should take precedent over the advancement of my research. Usually, when I write a paper for a presentation, I send it to the people concerned and ask what they think. Anonymisation is also important if it is wished for, but when you record life stories the process of preserving anonymity is all the more demanding.

On the move: Research during leisure travel and conferences

Instead of merely going to Frankfurt and staying there for an extended period, as classical fieldwork methods would suggest, I decided to follow the people I studied, to engage with them in their mobility from one place to another, whether for leisure or for work (Elliott et al. 2017). In their conceptualisation of the 'mobilities turn' (Büscher et al. 2004, p. 1), the sociologists Mimi Sheller, John Urry and Monika Büscher call for innovative approaches to study a world that is increasingly built on the mobility of people, goods, technologies and services. New work–life models to-day question a simple work/leisure (stationary/mobile) dichotomy and in order to

study emerging forms of mobilities and immobilities, old methods must be adapted and new methods invented. One such method is to join people during their journeys. So I decided to travel with my interlocutors.[11] With Maya and Otis I travelled as tourists to London and documented the trip with photos and fieldnotes. I had been staying in Frankfurt for a while when the idea came up that we could travel together to London. I had already considered travelling with people to see how Afrodiasporic identities matter during journeys and how identification and difference is created during leisure travel. The trip to London would be a good occasion for it. I told them beforehand that I would also use the trip for my research and would take notes and possibly ask them a few questions along the way. Before we set off, Maya made a plan of where she wanted to go; besides taking afternoon tea and visiting the Tate Modern art gallery, her list also included visiting Brixton, a multicultural neighbourhood much shaped by African and Caribbean migration, checking out a Ghanaian restaurant and taking a Notting Hill Black heritage tour. I documented much of our travel with photos and fieldnotes, mostly writing on my phone, and would sometimes put my recording device on when we had conversations I deemed interesting about Afrodiasporic and Black identity (after asking Maya and Otis for permission).

For instance, right after the Black heritage tour, I recorded a short video on my phone asking them both what they thought about the tour. Travelling together opens up the possibility of catching the experience in the moment and not only retrospectively in a later interview. This makes it possible to engage more closely with the more spontaneous aspects of the experience, for instance by going out at night dancing, and capturing the interlocutors' interactions with other people while travelling. It involves moments of joy, astonishment, exhaustion, like, dislike, disappointment – not only for the interlocutors but also for me as a participant and researcher. Travelling together also brought us closer as a group of friends, as it had been a very long time since we had spent so much time together. Moreover, it brought my research project closer to Maya and Otis. They were able to ask questions and see how I worked. The method of participation in people's leisure travel is used by anthropologists of tourism and travel to explore the diverse intersubjective experiences, negotiations and reflections that happen in tourist spaces. Edward Bruner (1995) and David Picard (2011) participated as tour guides to investigate practices of tourism, while Naomi Leite (2017) participated as a tourist in guided tours of Jewish heritage in Portugal, living in that country for an extended period. Valerio Simoni (2015) lived in Cuba several times for extended periods; his research also included multi-sited ethnography as he visited some people he got to know as tourists in Cuba in the places where they came from and lived. For other journeys that I could not participate in but which were of particular interest to my study – for example, travels to

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11   Part of this section has been published in *Feministische Geo-Rundmail*, a feminist research journal (Wojczewski 2020).

places associated to ancestral origin – I relied on ethnographic interviews after the trips were complete (for that method see Harrison (2003)).

I also undertook fieldwork at conferences that I attended between 2017 and 2019 to meet potential research participants. I also later travelled to several conferences with existing research participants. I decided to conduct fieldwork 'on the move', travelling to conferences and events, as I figured that this would open up my research to a more political and academic side of Afrodiasporic identities and reduce my reliance on friends and acquaintances. The first event I attended was the Afroeuropeans conference in Tampere in July 2017. I went to present my ongoing research, and my PhD supervisor suggested that it could also be a good 'field site' to get to know potential research participants while I was there. Until then, the possibility had not occurred to me, but I could recognise that conferences were good platforms to introduce my research to potentially interested people. This is how I met Oxana Chi, Layla Zami and Nina.

I tried to spend a lot of time just hanging out with them at the events and while travelling together as this allowed us to talk about diverse aspects of the research process, such as why I was interested in the topic (I will return to this question further below), which methods I was using and why. Informality was especially valuable when working with women I did not yet know, like Oxana and Layla, two Black Queer feminist artists, activists and researchers. It also enabled them to occasionally talk frankly about fears they had about my research. In Black political and feminist movements, it has long been recognised that representation matters and that who talks about whom, why and how is an important political matter, considering that public discussions of racism and racialisation are very often carried out entirely by white people, rather than including the voices of Black people and People of Colour, who have long been speaking up about how they are affected by these issues (Sow 2008, Hasters 2019, Oguntoye et al. 1986, Ogette 2018, Davis 1981, hooks 1981, Ha 2012, Lorde 2012, Ritz 2009). Being a white woman researcher myself, I often feared that I would not be accepted as person writing about Black experiences, that I would not be considered legitimate because I was not racialised myself. But my experiences suggest that this was not the case. There were occasionally Black women who declined to be interviewed, always with a polite refusal, but I cannot be sure that they rejected the interview because I was white. Most of the time I was accepted in my role as a potential ally standing in solidarity with Black political movements. I was often asked at conferences what I was researching and why, but never met with hostility simply because I was white – that turned out just to be just my own fear.

Researching with people who are keenly aware of what research about them could mean in terms of (mis-)representation and who were, at times, particularly suspicious towards anthropologists (due to the involvement of the discipline in the construction of false 'race theories') was a very educational journey, and the sense of learning deepended as I moved towards the end of the research process and into the

PhD writing process. When I wrote I often thought, 'What would Oxana think about what I am writing about her? Or what would Lafia think?' This mental questioning is based on advice I received regarding writing about others from Oxana and Layla. Sitting in a café after a conference in Toronto about Black Germany (BGHRA[12]) to which we had all travelled together, they told me: 'Look, we know we cannot control what, or how, you write about us, but what we want to make sure of is that what transcends is that what you write is not what we are, but your analysis of, and your thoughts about, who you think we are.' They did not resist the fact that I as a researcher could write about them and their lives, but instead they stressed the importance of making explicit our relationship and that what I write is the result of a dialogue that exists between them and me. They knew that my work consisted in writing about people, but they just wanted to make clear that what I wrote was not a definition of who they are from an outsider position, but a reflection on what they do as a result of an intersubjective relation and dialogue that we build together during the research process.

I have tried to keep that advice in mind during the process of writing. This means, as an author and researcher, constantly reflecting on how I represent those people I work with; what do I cite from interviews, how long are the citations, do I use real names or pseudonyms, how do I include my own role in the research process and in writing? Throughout my work, I try to engage seriously with Black women's voices and my PhD is a product of learning from Black women.

My experience of conducting fieldwork at Black political events has been unsettling in terms of experiencing racialised identity as a white person. But also and more importantly, it revealed how hard it generally is for Black activists in European countries to work on anti-Black racism, as it is often not recognised as a problem in European societies ('It is a problem in the USA but not here'). As I experienced things I had previously only read about in articles and books, or heard about from the accounts of informants, my admiration for Black and anti-racist activists increased. One important experience took place during a panel.

Afroeuropeans conference, Finland

I attended a panel at the Afroeuropeans conference in Tampere in 2017, where a Black Belgian researcher and activist talked about an Afrodiasporic organisation in Belgium. A white woman who was sitting in the audience raised her hand during the discussion just to say that she felt it was unfair that white people were excluded from Black networks, and that this was a very big problem (for her). In another panel she asked exactly the same question, and also began to tell her

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12   The Black German Heritage and Research Association conference, whose website is: http://b ghra.org/ut-2018/ (accessed 28 July 2020).

story – unrelated to the theme of the panel – about how she had been with an African man and since he had left her, she had felt stigmatised because she had been with him and because she was a single mother. That woman certainly felt like an exception at that time. I had not observed any weird interventions during other panels at the conference so far. The woman was not a researcher herself but had come out of interest in the topic and had been invited by friends who were in the organisational team, so her interest in the topic of Afrodiasporic identities appeared genuine. But her questions and comments felt really out of place at a conference about Black identities and anti-Black racism. I remember being impressed with the reactions of the presenter, having to respond to the question of the woman about white people being excluded. She stayed very calm, answering in a mostly friendly and reassuring way, and moving on quickly to the next question. I was also impressed by the solidarity present in the conference room when it appeared that that comment was about to take up more space in the discussion because the white woman wanted to say something else. Many people, especially Black women, raised their hands quickly, and in doing so suggested that it would be good to move on to the next question as swiftly as possible. I, on the contrary, felt a bit numb and unable to react the first time I had this experience. I also felt my face turning red, because I was ashamed to be one of the few white people in the room. I couldn't help but think, 'Why is this woman attending an Afroeuropean conference?'

After the last day of the conference, I walked home with Mélanie P., a PhD student and Black activist from Switzerland. I told her how uncomfortable I had felt when the white woman in the panel lamented about feeling excluded and how admiring I had been of the other delegates' reactions. Until then, I had assumed that this kind of occurrence must be absolutely exceptional and only happened because someone had invited the woman who was not a researcher but a friend of an organiser by mistake. Mélanie just shrugged her shoulders and said, 'Honestly, you know, that type of person will be at every event we organise, no matter the topic. We are used to having to deal with them – to us it is just normal.' (Fieldnote, July 2017)

This was when I realised that there were people attending Black political events who took up positions that denied – even if unintentionally – the existence of racism. Since then, at every conference or event I attended that dealt with Afrodescendant identities in Europe, I could be sure to bear witness to at least one white person affirming that they did not see race or that racism against white people was also a very big problem. At the University of Lausanne screening of the film *Métis*,[13] a documentary about mixed ethnic identities in the city, directed by Luc Godonou Dossou, himself an Afrodescendant person, a woman in her fifties who did not seem to have

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13   The trailer of this film is available at https://vimeo.com/243473247 (accessed 20 August 2020).

any attachment to the university, but who had clearly been delighted by the film, began her comment by telling the director who was present: 'I don't see black or white. For me you are more like brown or milk chocolate.' She continued by affirming that in the Valais canton, where she lived (so she had travelled from Valais to Lausanne to see the film!), the foreigners were all very well integrated, but once again many hands were quickly raised in order to not let that discussion take up too much space (she had already been talking for quite some time). At another event, this time a dance performance about being an Afrodescendant woman from Switzerland, *Je brûle pour Joséphine* by Safi Martin Yé,[14] there was a more unpleasant reaction in the audience. After the performance, there was a discussion round in which people could ask questions, and it quickly turned to racism in Switzerland, as the experience of this was one topic of the performance. At one point, a white woman who presented herself as a teacher, commented that in her career she only had encountered racism against white people and that she could not really see how racism against Black people or People of Colour existed. I cannot say what the motivation of that woman was to make that comment or to even come to this event, but in reaction the organisers had a five-minute discussion about what racism actually meant, giving a brief history of it and how it existed against Black people and not against white people as a structural problem in Switzerland. Another white woman in the public who affirmed that she had enjoyed the piece very much said how sad and shocked she was to hear that the performer had experienced racism in Switzerland.

These are all reactions exhibiting what Robin DiAngelo (2018) has called 'white fragility', sometimes also referred to as 'white tears'. The definitions of these phenomena generally refer to white people who do not face racism in their daily interactions, who do not recognise their own racist bias and who are not aware of the scope of everyday and structural racism. The denial of racism also stems from the belief that theories of human races have long been proved wrong and that therefore racism can no longer exist – it can stem from an anti-racist motivation, but it does not help those who nonetheless still experience it (Noiriel 2009). It was after these experiences that I came to understand how difficult it was for Black people and activists to openly talk about experiences of racism when met with denial even from people who would consider themselves open and tolerant. This exposure to people denying racism occurred not only through their engagement with anti-racism but also in their lived realities outside of activist work, where they regularly have to explain racism to their white friends or family members.

As Tarik Tesfu, a German journalist, TV presenter and Black activist argues in an Instagram post, 'BPoC are not a Google search engine. I sometimes ask myself where I would be professionally and privately if I didn't have to waste my time with

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14   Safi Martin Ye's website is safimartinye.ch/josephine.html (accessed 20 August 2020).

racism. I would probably be Beyoncé.'[15] It is not the responsibility of Black people and People of Colour (BPoC) to educate other people about racism by exposing their intimate experiences with it (in German the term used is often: *Seelenstriptease*, soul striptease), it is first and foremost up to those who profit from white privilege to educate themselves and do something about it, so that BPoC are no longer responsible. And I strongly agree with this argument: Anti-racist education should be a major concern for all societies, and books like *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019) from Ibram X Kendi can help with that.

I also believe that I learned a lot about the workings of racism as a daily, lived experience through friends who in Germany are affected by it in very specific ways and who have shared some of their experiences and insights with me since we were teenagers. It was through their sharing of experiences that I learned to be sensitive to everyday forms of racism and othering. Sharing personal experiences openly and publicly can also be a powerful source of political agency, as movements such as *#metoo* have shown. By exposing the sheer quantity of statements that are sexually or racially discriminatory, denial of the problem becomes more and more difficult.

Analytical approaches

In order to study coming of age in women of African descent in Germany and how they construct diasporic relations and practices throughout their lives, I work with concepts of 'class', 'diaspora' and 'kinship'. By focusing on the lives of five women, I intend to demonstrate the ways in which class, diaspora and kinship relations have influenced how they understand themselves and their position in the world. Using an intersectional approach to class/race/gender, I analyse how these three categories structure these women's identification processes. I take a practice-oriented approach to diaspora and kinship, analysing the practices used by the interlocutors to create kinship ties and diasporic communities: practices of care (of self and others), of travelling and of storytelling.

An intersectional approach to class, race and gender

The women I worked with when writing my thesis belong to the middle class, are often highly educated and come from families of mixed national heritage. They grew

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15   All translations from German to English are from the author. Original citation: 'BPoCs sind keine Google-Suchmaschine. Ich frage mich manchmal, wo ich privat und beruflich stehen würde, wenn ich meine Zeit nicht auch mit Rassismus verschwenden müsste. Wahrscheinlich wäre ich Beyoncé.' https://www.instagram.com/p/CBck1Vyqy2Q/?igshid=dpkjiba8yzlr (accessed 30 June 2020).

up in Germany, learned German as their first language, have a German parent, finished school, went to university and are currently in work. In comparison to their parents, they were either able to achieve some upward social mobility or at least were able to maintain the same social and economic level. And yet, when they have a non-European migration history in their families, they are often confronted with being perceived as 'not German', and experience discrimination and othering in the society they call home. They are faced with 'migrantisation' (El-Tayeb 2016), with being constructed as foreigners no matter how many generations their family has lived in Germany. Taking this particular situation into account, my approach will be attentive to the formation of a middle class, but a middle class that is racialised and gendered. This relation between racialisation and class has not been the focus of many ethnographic studies so far and usually only in relation to the working classes.

In Germany and Europe, a new generation has come of age – the children of those who migrated from many different European, African and Asian countries since the 1960s have, in the meantime, formed or are starting to form families of their own (Crul et al. 2012). The second and third generations of Europeans with non-European origins are now adults. They are the children of those who came either as labour migrants, many of whom had lower socioeconomic backgrounds (they formed the majority of non-European migrants since the 1950s) or as international students or political refugees, some of whom originated from higher socioeconomic milieus in the 1960s and 1970s. It is the latter group that I want to pay particular attention to. I study the connection between class and ethnicity/race with a focus on the middle class instead of the working class, which has been the main concern in Germany up to now both in academia and public discourse. Studies on the social and economic mobility of migrants and their descendants in Germany have predominantly focused on the large groups of immigrants, such as the Turkish population, and less on migrants from African countries who – with the exception of Moroccans and Tunisians who arrived as labour migrants in larger numbers in the 1960s and 1970s – have come to Germany in smaller numbers.

For the examination of the link between class and racialisation of people of African descent in Germany, it is useful to look at Germany's history of migration since the 1950s, the time of the West German 'economic miracle'. Migration from African or Asian countries to Germany only began to increase after World War II. Before that date, there were of course people of African or Asian origin in Germany (or the diverse territories that are called Germany today). They came, for example, during the era of German and European colonialism, but not in large numbers and usually not from diverse economic backgrounds, most of them being members of the elites of their countries of origin. Many (though not all) of those then left Germany after World War I (see Chapter 2 on the history of African diaspora in Germany). Although migration of African and Asian students and high qualified workers increased from the 1960s (see Chapter 2 for African student migration), the

majority of non-European migrants in Germany since 1945 belonged to the working class and came to Germany (and many other European countries) as 'guest workers' in the West, or as 'contract workers' in East Germany. Between 1966 and 1989, the GDR (German Democratic Republic) hired more than 500,000 contract workers from Vietnam, Poland, Mozambique, Angola and other 'socialist brother countries'. And between 1955 and 1973, the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) contracted almost three million guest workers, mostly men between the ages of 20 and 40, from a wide range of countries, such as Tunisia, Yugoslavia, Morocco, Italy, Turkey and Greece. Today, their families and descendants account for the majority of people with an international migration history in Germany (including descendants down to the third or even fourth generation today). Especially since the construction of the Berlin wall in 1961 and the interruption of refugee flows from the GDR, the FRG increasingly contracted workers from other countries (Seifert 1995, p. 24). As a result of this hiring of guest workers, the percentage of foreigners in Germany grew from 1.2 per cent in 1960 to almost 5 per cent in 1970. By the time the practice ceased in 1973, about 2.6 million foreign workers had come to Germany; between 1973 and 1979 the only legal form of immigration besides seeking refuge status was in the form of family unification, and so this time was marked by a lot of immigration of nuclear family members of guest workers.

Due to heavy immigration restrictions, most migrants to Germany in the 1980s and 1990s were either refugees or 'ethnic Germans' arriving from former Soviet countries; the latter were rapidly granted German citizenship if they could show German ancestry. Migration researcher Wolfgang Seifert notes that there is continuity within German immigration policy regarding the preference of migrants with German ancestry. They enjoyed a range of integration measures, while little was undertaken to help integrate migrants from Mediterranean countries such as Morocco or Turkey. On the contrary, policies for these groups were sometimes dominated by repatriation measures (Seifert 1995, p. 31). Immigration policy has changed a lot since 1955, and since 2000 Germany has officially accepted that it is an immigration country with a possibility to acquire citizenship by the principle of *jus soli* (i.e. as a result of being born in Germany) and not only by descent, or *jus sanguinis* (Butterwegge 2005). Since 1 January 2000, children born in Germany of non-German parents can apply for German citizenship when one parent has lived in Germany for a minimum of eight consecutive years. Today more than 20 per cent of the population have a 'migration background', which means that they or at least one parent migrated to Germany (BPB 2017). The idea that all migrants will form communities when they arrive at a destination country and that the second generation will be torn between maintaining their ethnic culture and assimilating to the culture of their country of destination has been put forward by Portes and Zhou (1993), among others. In contrast, Drouhot and Nee find (2019) that rather than stressing immigrants' formation of communities, it is important to note the

crucial role played by socioeconomic resources – class – in assimilation.[16] This is something they stress in their review of second-generation assimilation processes in Western Europe.

Most of my interlocutors' primomigrant parents arrived in Germany and lived with German host families, in student dorms or in shared flats with other young Germans or international students – unlike, for example, Turkish people who came as guest workers and associated more with co-ethnics living in the same neighbourhoods (e.g. Kreuzberg in Berlin). The more classic theme relating class and migration in Europe, namely research on the production of an ethnicised/racialised proletariat as a result of guest worker migration, does not apply to my research. It is all the more interesting to look at the topic differently and see how the second generation I focus on understands itself under these specific circumstances in time and place. First, the individuals of the second generation whom I study were not part of 'ethnic communities' while growing up: Because most of them had one white German and one West African parent, they knew the cultural worlds of both their mother and their father.

Second, the historical economic context in Germany matters for their understanding of class position. My interlocutors mostly come from middle-class family backgrounds with a high educational level (what in Germany is known as *Bildungsbürgertum*: educated middle class or middle class through education rather than through entrepreneurship). Their parents were already were part of the middle class upon migration and most had met in student or bourgeois left circles – in many cases they were German women who had met West African men. For the parents of my interlocutors, education – at university if possible – was very important for their children.

The interlocutors in my study define themselves as middle class, and this is mostly in line with their economic and social living standards. Their subjective understanding of class matches the objective characteristics in most regards. As a result of their middle-class consciousness, they also have a particular vision of how they should participate in society, including politically; they join civil society organisations or committees at their children's schools, for instance.

Studies of migration and class mobility in Germany are still scarce. The sociologist Barbara Lemberger studies mobility from the working to the middle class mostly through entrepreneurial activity among descendants of Turkish emigrants in Berlin (Lemberger 2019). She analyses the status transformation among a migrant community that was marginalised for a long time by restrictive migration, citizenship and labour policy in Germany as an act of resistance and a collective process of

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16   Drouhot and Nee define assimilation 'as the declining significance of context-specific markers of difference—like race, ethnicity, or religion—in the lives of immigrants and their children' (2019, p. 179).

social transformation.[17] That economic mobility also created new opportunities for involvement in culture and politics.

I stress the word 'educated' in the designation of the people I study as educated middle class, because in terms of economic capital, the status of my participants often seems closer to the working class, but in terms of education, it is closer to the upper classes. This in-betweenness is often a characteristic of the middle class. Although Germany did not suffer as much as other countries from the 2008 global financial crisis, my participants have experienced the effects of the neoliberal reforms undertaken from 2002 under Social Democratic chancellor Gerhard Schröder and his '*Agenda 2010*'. Those reforms made massive cuts to the German state welfare system and deregulated the labour market (Butterwegge et al. 2007). My participants entered the job market right after the reforms with job insecurity due to short-term contracts and a very weak real wage development; they had experiences of unpaid internships and low pay as self-employed workers in the culture industry and other sectors. Today many of the children of the German Baby Boomer generation face the real fear of not having enough money for their retirement. In that respect, my participants occupy 'contradictory class locations' (Carrier 2015, p. 34), with high levels of cultural and social capital but less economic capital.

The global financial crisis of 2008 affected most countries, leading to the emergence of new social movements. Ever since then, concepts of class have begun to feature more prominently in anthropological research. The anthology edited by James Carrier and Don Kalb *Anthropologies of Class: Power, Practice and Inequality* (2015), the result of an EASA (European Association of Social Anthropology) panel in 2010, is one example of the new prominence that class analysis has attained. In the social sciences, the assumption is not that class exists as a set of independent monolithic structures. Rather, research mostly focuses on 'the experiences and historic relationships of working people as they begin to make sense of their shared conditions and develop (or not) a shared identity' (Carbonella and Kasmir 2015, p. 42). Studying class is about studying the evolution and change in a group's consciousness about their role in capitalist society's systems of re/production and the ways that this affects other socioeconomic milieus.

The middle class has often been described as a group between the working class and the capitalist class, one that has aspirations and opportunities for limited upward mobility but with a constant *Fear of Falling* – as the sociologist Barbara Ehrenreich discussed in her 1989 book. For Ehrenreich, the middle class does not stand in clear opposition to the traditional classes of workers and capitalists. But people

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17   Hiring stop of guest workers in 1973, restrictions on immigration from non-European countries, attempts to force return migration, difficulties in legalising citizen status, racist campaigns and attacks, see Berlinghoff (2019) or Seifert (1995) about the framing of 'welcome' and 'unwelcome' immigrants along racial/ethnic lines.

from the middle classes differ from other working people in the way that they have achieved an economic level that gives them the freedom to invest spare time and money in more than their direct needs: Investing in private property and 'human capital' (education and training) are the key strategies that Hadas Weiss (2019) describes as characteristic of the middle classes. For Weiss, one thing is clear: The middle classes are workers. This group comprises people who have to engage in wage labour for a living – from the teacher to the high-ranking manager. The middle class has a specific ideology which differs from that of other workers: People in the middle classes believe in self-determination; they believe that hard work and sacrifice will make upward mobility possible and that these are more important than structural forces of capitalism. The language of investment is crucial for the middle class: It is through investments in private property and education that the middle-class worker believes that they will attain a better wage and independent future for themselves and their children. This is what Hadas Weiss describes as the underlying ideology of people from the middle classes.

> This ideology is most credible among those who, while having to work for a living, can nevertheless devote some extra work, time and other resources toward the future, expending more than they immediately consume. (Weiss 2019, p. 119)

Yet these investments in the future are very fragile, and the returns generated are unreliable and depend more on capitalist market forces than on personal investment strategies; the 2008 economic crisis showed this brutally to many middle-class homeowners and pension savers throughout the world. This was especially the case as the most common investment strategies often include the assumption of heavy debts to pay mortgages. Moreover, the additional and unforeseen costs that come with private property often weigh heavier than the middle-class investor would have thought. But the hope for a better future that Weiss describes is so strong that workers will continue to pursue such investment strategies. She describes the middle class as standing in antagonism to both work and capital: It uses the (small) capital it accumulates for its own benefit, which relies on the exploitation of workers (as workers always participate in the accumulation of surplus beyond the recompense that they receive), while still having to work to save for investment. Most of my interlocutors have to deal with the issues described by Weiss, and a fear of falling combined with efforts towards achieving a better future are inherent traits of their lifestyles. What further complicates the middle-class status of my interlocutors is their experiences related to othering and racialisation, which add to the fear of falling; yet another aspect is bound up with the relations the women have to their transnational African kin. People with transnational families often face additional investment burdens besides investing in themselves and their children: They are often also involved in supporting other family or community members, if these are from

poorer economic countries. And due to the strong sense of responsibility that Weiss also describes as one of the political characteristics of being middle class, the financial burden carried by transnational family members to support others can be high.

One additional strategy that I want to add to the ideology of the middle classes is mobility and migration as investment for the future wellbeing of the family. Whether in the case of Caribbean middle-class families, who see migration to countries of the North as the main strategy for upward economic mobility (Amit 2007, Olwig 2007) or in the case of student mobility, where geographic mobility is engaged in to build a cosmopolitan vision of self, geographic mobility is a key aspect of social mobility around the world. In my work, I show how imaginations and practices of mobility are intertwined with plans for a better future by my middle-class research interlocutors, and how mobility plays in strategies of self-fulfilment while also being directed towards the future wellbeing of one's children.

In order to understand what it means for my participants come of age as people of African descent, it is important to grasp their relations to an African diasporic identity that is informed by a middle-class status in Germany (and Frankfurt in particular) and the way race/racialisation and class intermingle.

Racism can affect a middle-class German woman of African descent differently than a working-class African migrant man in Germany. Different stereotypes exist of 'African man' and 'African woman' and classism plays a part, especially because the net of relationships and access to im/material resources will differ for the affected person, as will mechanisms of agency.

Racialisation has a classist component in Germany. When people of non-European origin, especially from South Asian, African and Arab countries, are racialised, there are classist stereotypes inherent to the discrimination as well. For example, stereotypes some of the stereotypes of migrantised people include the image of the refugee who only came for social benefits and does not want to work or of a migrant woman who cannot integrate well and is not able or willing to learn the language or the culture of the country of destination (El-Tayeb 2016).

Since Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1991 study of how violence manifests itself in particular ways for Women of Colour in the USA, intersectional analysis has been widely used in feminist social studies. Intersectionality claims that socially constructed categories of difference are interrelated in their effect on a person. Categories such as race/ethnicity, class and gender cannot be analysed as single strands but must be understood as interrelated (Brah & Phoenix 2004).

Some social categories locate my participants in positions of relative privilege and others place them in situations of relative disadvantage, but they all come together in the same person. Because they are not white, the women I work with can find themselves the target of racist and sexist discrimination. Ranging from very subtle forms right up to physical abuse, all of this can have an effect on how they move, dress or behave in public and professional spaces. At the same time, their rel-

ative privilege in terms of socioeconomic status and nationality makes it possible to attenuate the negative consequences of racist or sexist discrimination and often put these experiences into the backgrounds of their lives (see Chapters 4 and 5), sometimes addressing them (being active in anti-racism networks, for example, or discussing racism in school with children's teachers) and sometimes ignoring them. It is this relation between privilege and disadvantage and how the women navigate these positions that informs my work (Adler 2019). In Chapters 6, 7 and 8, while following my interlocutors' journeys, I argue that travelling and meeting with transnational kin forces them to confront their own class and gender positions, which is particularly manifest in the arrangements they make for their personal safety during these travels. Throughout, I show how becoming aware of their privilege when they travel is a process my participants all engage with, as they come from and live in a wealthy European country. The contradictions in their class position is also evident in their transnational kin relations, which include global inequalities between North and South. Furthermore, their travels show how a new environment can be a ground for experiencing shifting social positions in terms of racialised identities, in the sense that their skin colour or African descent matters differently in different contexts for them and for others. Being and perceiving themselves as educated and middle class impacts on how the women in my study understand their position in society. The intellectual capital they have gained through their access to higher education affords them tools and social networks to deal with their racialised and sexualised subject position in Germany. When I use 'position' it is not meant as a stable position but as a location in a 'shifting field of forces' (Carrier & Kalb 2015, p. 15), a dynamic system.

The experience of growing up is also gendered. And there are certain potent stereotypes that my participants were confronted with because they were Black women – such as the stereotype of the exotic and sexually available woman. They also had to cope with the feeling of not matching typical European beauty standards (being white, blonde and blue-eyed) and with having their hair straightened while growing up. As adults, they were often able to transform these experiences to build renewed self-confidence as adult Afrodescendant women. This was helped by education and the availability of Black women's beauty blogs, which try to construct positive images and role-models for people of African descent.

The women in my research know that compared to other racialised people and groups in Germany, they are socially and economically privileged because they have German citizenship or access to higher education. And this is one reason why they also feel it is their duty to do something against racism and to be engaged in anti-racism networks actively. This awareness of social and economic privilege as a racialised person influences the people in my study in such a way that they feel a responsibility towards other not so privileged members to have to take up a leadership function and engage politically on different levels.

In chapters 3, 4 and 5, I present the cases of Aminata Camara, her friend Maya B., their acquaintance Lafia T. and Aminata's father Lamine Camara, arguing that their reflections and actions are influenced by their middle-class and highly educated status. This enabled Aminata to pursue a political role in Germany, just as her father Lamine Camara took on a political leadership function within the Guinean diaspora in Germany. It also affects Lafia's relationship with her Senegalese father and Maya's ability to build a Black identity as a child and teenager. In the American context, the sociologist Franklin Frazier saw the emergence and establishment of a Black middle class as the foundation for the coming of age of an independent and transformed Black community in the US. He analyses the emergence of a *Black Bourgeoisie* in the USA (1957) – a social group that was still subordinated by the logics of racism in the USA but nonetheless formed a middle class in terms of education and economic capital.

An identity movement based on one axis of identity can never be fully detached from other socially constructed categories. Identity movements based on ethnicity or race are also shaped by dimensions such as class or gender. For instance, a closer look into some African diaspora organisations I studied shows that Black and Afrodescendant organisations advocating for the rights of Black people and People of Colour also work with and formulate class critique. This might be less pronounced and less obvious than the intersection of racialisation and gender, but it is there nonetheless. Class consciousness plays a role in the development of both individual Black identities and group movements, as one goal of these is to attenuate a systemic non-representation or misrepresentation of People of Colour in the middle and upper classes of German society, and to criticise their overrepresentation in the working class. And although it is true that the explicit goals of such activists and movements often focus on anti-racism and anti-sexism, building solidarity between different occupations is also important. The Afro-German Graduate Network (ADAN *Afro-Deutsches Akademiker Netzwerk*), for example, offers professional support to people of African descent who want to pursue higher education but do not necessarily come from families with a history of higher education and professional careers and lack the social and cultural resources that could support them. Looking at another identity movement, anthropologist Luisa Steur (2015) considers the rise of Adivasi indigenous identity on the Indian subcontinent through the lens of class relations and sees a class dimension in the claim to Adivasi identity. She asks when, how and why people from a specific region in Kerala began to see themselves as Adivasi. Steur shows how claiming Adivasiness is a way to gain access to material resources (land) and political rights rather than a claim to an essentialised ethnic identity. Claiming an ethnic identity also has to be seen in relation to class.

Class location and consciousness matter in the individual lives of the women I follow. When did these women began to see themselves as Black or Afrodescendant and why? The 'when' takes on a double meaning: It refers to a certain moment in

the course of their lives but also, more generally, to more general developments in Germany and Europe when they grew up in the 1980s and 1990s. I shed light on that question by exploring the personal biographies of the women and analyse the emergence of intersections among class, racialisation, gender and generation in their lives in a specific time and place.

Kinship and diaspora

In addition to class, my thesis engages with questions of kinship and diaspora. The concept of kinship in diaspora communities is significant for my research in two different ways: It was important for the women in my study, both while growing up, when it defined their belonging to family and other communities, and when they travelled, for example to places of ancestral 'origin' – where 'origin' can relate not only to a geographical place but also to cultural and regional practices more broadly. At the same time, it also refers to the practice of engaging in Black (feminist) communities globally and building 'chosen families'.

My work demonstrates how important kinship is in the diasporic identity-making processes of the young women. It analyses how kinship and the tensions inherent in kinship relations inform identity constructions through time; how, for example, efforts of (re)connection with transnational African kin are related to a wish to develop African diasporic identification. It also shows how racialisation plays into kinship relations. The long-term and in-depth engagement with the lives of the five women reveals how experiences of racialisation can lead to phenomena such as rejection of the African part of one's family at one point in life, while, at another time, they can be at the centre of reconnection efforts that challenge racialisation by engaging with African transnational family constructively.

The intimate dimension of diaspora and kinship

The women in this study have dealt with their African origins in diverse ways throughout their lives. Often, their perceptions and practices of identification with their heritage underwent significant modification when they were teenagers and young adults, changing again when they began to have or plan families of their own. I trace the process of developing a diasporic identity by focusing on how Aminata, Maya and Lafia constructed a particular relationship to their African descent (Chapter 3), how that relationship shifted throughout their lives and how their experiences and life in Germany – and of being the first digital natives – informed their consciousness. Generation matters on two levels in my research: It reveals how people can understand themselves as part of a collective through shared experiences and references while growing up, in my case, people of African descent in Germany and Europe born around the 1980s and part of the generation of *Millennials*. And it helps in understanding kinship relations, that is, how members

of a same family deal differently with migration history and how belonging to a first, second or third generation in a family matters for processes of belonging or diasporic practice (Trémon 2019, Smith 2006). In my research, I focus on generation and racialisation in order to explain how diasporic identities are created and the diasporic practices of Germans of African descent evolve throughout their lives.

Taking an intergenerational perspective while focusing on Aminata and her father Lamine Camara in Chapter 4, I contend that besides all the differences between the trajectories and practices of father and daughter, Lamine Camara, who came to Germany with a student scholarship in the 1970s from Guinea, and Aminata, born in Frankfurt in the 1980s, both practise *centred* and *decentred* visions of diaspora, the former directed to Guinean or West African politics and culture, while the latter works transversally with a more hybrid and deterritorialised concept of diaspora. It is precisely the fact that the link to the country of origin has been weakened through migration for subsequent generations that this possibility of a decentred diasporic practice arises. It is a practice that can relate to different countries and regions. In the cases I study, the diasporic practices extend to various African countries but also to African diasporas in Europe. I approach the concept of diaspora ethnographically by focusing on how it is practised by individuals in their everyday lives; practices that can be directed both towards a place of (ancestral) origin, whether imagined or real, but also towards relations and activities in multiple places and for diverse cultural and political purposes. In my cases, these diasporic practices encompass practices of travelling, of caring and of storytelling.

When studying diasporas or diasporic practices, sociologist Rogers Brubaker (2005) claims that it is only when the identification with a diasporic homeland persists for more than one generation that it becomes sociologically persistent and thus appropriate for us to speak of a diaspora.

The connection of kinship, family and coming of age in international migration contexts has become important in anthropology through the emergence since the 1980s of transnational and globalisation studies, with important scholars like Nina Glick Schiller, Karen Fog Olwig or Robert Smith. In France, sociologists such as Abdelmalek Sayad began studying similar things as early as the late 1970s. Diasporic practices and feelings depend a lot on the individual person and how they wish to think about the place framed as their origin or the transnational practices in their life and their wishes to transmit these to children or grandchildren. If parents have a strong desire to keep alive the attachment to a place of origin, then the feeling and practice of transnational attachment can remain strong into the third generation of descendants and beyond (Smith 2006).

Khachig Tölölyan (1996) stresses that a person does not simply belong to a diaspora but that they have to practise that belonging actively. My approach to diaspora is that it is a set of political and cultural relations and practices that must be seen as a constantly active process in the lives of people and their institutions and which can

be *centred* (in relation to a place of 'origin') as well as *decentred* (consisting of relations in their country of residence and/or other places). Diaspora has been studied from three different angles. It has long been studied as a bounded entity and community to which a certain set of predefined criteria apply, such as a shared experience of forced exile and a strong reference and relations with a place of origin – often a place to which it is difficult or even impossible to return (Safran 1991, Tölölyan 1996). William Safran tries to define whether one can speak of a community as diaspora and analyses different communities using predefined criteria which he takes from theories of the Jewish diaspora – the most important being the relation to a (mythical) homeland. He never starts from individuals and how they perceive or practice diaspora, but always remains on the level of community. I chose to use the opposite approach by starting not with the community but with the individual and how s/he practices diasporic identification.

Scholars from the field of cultural studies in particular have contested the inflexible vision of diaspora and countered it with a decentred and multi-polar conception, focusing on its hybrid and diffuse character. Instead of focusing on the reference to a specific place of origin, they have explored, for example, the construction of diaspora stemming from shared experiences of displaced/mobile people in a country of residence (Clifford 1994, Gilroy 1993, Hall 1990). By tracing how understandings of diaspora shifted from essentialist and nationalist visions from the end of the nineteenth century (Black Nationalism and Zionism) to anti-essentialist visions of diaspora as fluid and hybrid identities in the 1990s that speak of multiple centres of belonging or attachment, Clifford (1994) posits diaspora to be a constant dialogue and development between people and places that cannot be reduced to the term's etymological meaning of 'scattered'.

In my approach, centred and decentred practices of diaspora and hybrid and essentialist visions of diaspora are not mutually exclusive – they all come together in the practices of people, which vary in time and space and from person to person (see more below). This approach corresponds with the third phase of diaspora studies, which starts from a more constructivist point of view, understands diaspora as a set of relations and practices to be explored and calls for a focus on 'diasporic relations', feelings and perceptions with an intergenerational perspective (Brubaker 2005, Bidet and Wagner 2012, Trémon 2019).[18] The anthropologist Anne-Christine Trémon, for instance, follows the diasporic relations of people of Chinese descent in Tahiti down to the fifth generation. Trémon (2017) advances the argument that through the rupture/distanciation of China as a homeland for subsequent generations of descendants of migrants a shift of transnational practices occurs:

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18   For a thorough discussion of the evolution of the concept of diaspora, see, for example, Calafat and Goldblum (2012).

Transnationalism based on migration (attachment to a homeland) becomes a diasporic transnationalism focused on new countries of destination. This approach is able to accommodate the *centred* and *decentred* conception of diaspora in its practical dimension.

Intergenerational relations with kin and diverse processes of 'doing kinship' or 'doing family' are crucial for the processes of coming of age and the diasporic practices of my participants. I argue that in their processes of creating diasporic identities for themselves, kinship holds a crucial place. I show that making kinship is a lifelong process and the wish to do, or indeed undo, kinship can come up at different stages. In the lives of the women I work with, this is particularly presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, where I analyse the 'diasporic travels' of Maya B., Lafia T. and Aminata Camara. The women travel to visit kin in Senegal, Ghana and Sierra Leone where they are confronted with different conceptions of who should give and receive (what) care and who can be trusted as 'family'. To some extent Maya, Lafia and Aminata also experience and have to cope with a 'status paradox' (Nieswand 2012, Simoni & Voirol 2020) within the extended family: being from a rich European country, they face certain expectations from their African family members. They also create expectations towards themselves based on a moral obligation to support their family members. Family relations are not detached from social and economic conditions. Societal problems, gender imbalances, racism, classism are part and parcel of making, practising and negotiating kinship, too. On this note, Kath Weston, researching lesbian and gay family making, points to an important issue to consider:

> Don't make the mistake, though, of thinking that because lesbians and gay men now claim chosen families, these are freely chosen families. There are constraints on any choice. Color, access to money, and social connections leave some people more constrained than others. (1997, p. xv)

Even the 'families we choose', as Weston reminds us, are not chosen without constraint. The motivation to travel to regions of ancestral origins is considerably influenced by the wish to create and experience transnational kinship. By making kin transnationally, these women can actively establish new relations that make their African descent a part of their lives. But this experience also reveals that forging kinship is difficult, especially when it includes people of different national origins and social and economic backgrounds. When it comes to the diasporic identity processes of the women, rupture and tension in kinship relations are as crucial as connections and resemblances. Anne-Christine Trémon (2022) develops Marshall Sahlins' concept of 'mutuality of being' (2011a, 2011b) for analysing the challenges of making diasporic kinship. Sahlins uses 'mutuality of being' and 'mutuality of existence' as synonyms in explaining kinship. Trémon makes a distinction between mutuality of being and mutuality of existence: Mutuality of being refers to having a common

ancestor, sharing a lineage, but without being close kin. By contrast, mutuality of existence refers to close kin who share a certain everyday life together; they are included in each other's lives. The women in my research were usually in a mutuality of being with their diasporic kin and their travels were motivated by the wish to create closer kinship ties. But meetings with kin also revealed the limits of doing kinship and creating a sense of belonging between distant kin.

Through the diasporic travels of the three women, I demonstrate that a crucial part of the desire to (re)connect or not with a region of ancestral origin is to do with relations with parents. In these cases, that means fathers. Just as relationships with parents go through different stages, so do relations to the ancestral place of origin. They are inextricably interconnected. I contend that although all my subjects were visiting their place of 'ancestral origin' as adult women for the first time, they were not perceived as strangers or tourists, nor did they perceive themselves as that. Instead, they were able, even if only for a short time, to be integrated into wider kinship circles and experience 'family' and their position in it, though their socioeconomic status meant they could also occasionally enjoy the privileges of being tourists, too. Many studies on diasporic or roots travel still underline that these travellers often feel like strangers in the places they have defined as their origins.

In studies of both traditional roots travel (Kim 2010, Louie 2004) and visits by the second generation to the villages of their parents (Bidet & Wagner 2012), there is often a focus on alterity. My analysis adds to these findings. My participants share a strong determination to become part of the community in their places of origin. Although they also consider themselves to be strangers and sometimes do not even know the kin they are visiting, they also want to feel part of the ancestral communities for political and personal reasons and put a lot of effort into that undertaking. In the travel narratives, I examine the social and cultural tensions experienced by my research participants when they travel to visit kin. I argue that these include class but also gender negotiation processes, which often take place within these wider kinship circles and are negotiated over the aspect of 'care'. I draw particular attention to the role of care in making kinship and creating a mutual existence in my work.

In the cases of the women I follow, the wish or need to get to know 'their roots' – in other words, the birth country of their parent – was often suggested to them by other people. It was often an external motivator or a chain of events that ended up turning that wish to explore 'origins' into a personal one. Interested in the role that kinship plays in the construction of self and personhood, Signe Howell explores the process of making or creating kinship in transnational adoption settings, which she refers to as 'kinning' and 'kinned subjectivation'. I take Howell's concept of 'kinning' as a starting point to explore how kinship is made by establishing mutual relations through care and continuity and the importance of kinship for diasporic identity processes:

> By kinning, I mean the process by which a foetus or new-born child (or a previously unconnected person) is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom. […] Through being kinned, the adoptees qualify their personhood through their relations to others. (Howell 2003, p. 465ff)

Since the 1990s, partly due to developments in reproductive technology and an increased interest in (transnational) adoption, there has been a resurgence of kinship studies and anthropologists are increasingly using a relational perspective to explore kinship, personhood and gender. Under this approach, kinship relations are analysed as fundamental to processes of subject formation (Carsten 2004, Faubion 2001, Howell 2003). As James Faubion describes in the introduction to the edited volume *The Ethics of Kinship* (2001), studies about kinship have moved on from 'the semantics to the pragmatics': The practicalities of making family have shifted to the foreground:

> People 'fudge' – quite often with the blithe complicity of those around them. They make kin; they change kin; they forge and consecrate alliances, of greatly diverse sorts, in the very vocabulary of filiation and descent. (2001, p. 1)

Many scholars now agree that caring and nurturing or the idea of sharing an existence (Sahlins 2011a, 2011b) are constitutive of close kinship or family relations.

Though kinship was at the core of the discipline of Anthropology until the mid-twentieth century, it was increasingly criticised by post-structural and feminist scholarship starting in the 1970s (Schneider 1984, Collier &Yanagisako 1987). But it was also feminist anthropologists who increasingly turned to kinship studies in order to understand the positions and roles of women in different societies, reframing and restudying many former kinship topics, such as the family, the household, the division of labour, sex, marriage and procreation (Ortner 1972, Moore 1994). Feminist scholars used Schneider's critique of kinship because it 'illuminated biology as a native cultural system in the West' (Carsten 2004, p. 59).

Adding to Carsten's analysis of what made kinship fashionable again, I would argue that she omits mention of the importance of transnationalism and migration scholarship in anthropology, which also fostered a new interest in changing kinship systems in a globalised and mobile world. Studies of transnational families have focused on how kinship is made/created for people in the diaspora and between diasporas and places of origin. That revision of kinship studies has increasingly led to considering it more *as a practice*, with a focus on building relations.

An aspect that has seldom been explored in kinship studies is the role of race/racialisation in kinship-making processes. I explore the role that (shared)

experiences of being racialised plays in genealogical understandings of kinship but also in defining 'chosen families' (Weston 1993).

The community dimension of kinship and the Black diaspora

Kinship also has a political dimension. For instance, for two Black feminist activists considered in this study, Oxana Chi and Layla Zami (Chapter 10), kinship is constructed on two levels: at the level of community, in the building of solidarity networks of Black and feminist 'sisters' and through the practice of working together towards common goals embodying the mantra of 'the personal is political and the political is personal'; and privately as a queer couple who love and support each other in everything and are willing to share their life publicly, online and in their work collaborations.

Going beyond genealogy, I explore the idea of 'chosen family' as put forward by Kath Weston in her work on lesbian and gay family practices (1997) and apply it to the making of Black political networks – and how sharing one's life story can contribute to the feeling of finding a chosen family: 'sisters' and 'brothers' who share the same fate of being affected by racism. Drawing from the intimate and professional lives and life stories of Oxana Chi (dancer and choreographer) and Layla Zami (Performance Studies scholar), I contend in Chapters 9 and 10 that the act of life storytelling – whether during day-to-day conversations or as speakers and performers at public events – is a way to construct a sense of self as part of a global community of Afro-feminist activists. Personal stories become a tool for political agency, a way to transform private into public meaning and to construct community and Black feminist sisterhood.

Chosen kinship captures the nature of the relationships in Black and feminist communities: It is not necessarily friendship (though very often it is), but characters come together who might be very different. They identify with each other due to specific experiences of marginalisation in society. In the case of Black women, they share a subject position that forces them to deal with racism and sexism constantly in their everyday lives. And this common experience informs their sisterhood. They stand together in solidarity in their fight against racism and meet occasionally at community events. The kinship structure is meant to formalise an informal relationship, saying: Even if we do not agree on other things, we stand together when it comes to fighting racism and sexism and to celebrate African-ness and Blackness. Of course, friendships often co-occur with sisterhood, and then it goes beyond simple friendship, because there is also the common identification as Afrodescendant and a consciousness of facing many of the same challenges in society. In Black women's movements, the ties can run from very deep to fairly loose – the deep ones are always also connected to long-term friendships and the looser ones are acquaintances, e.g. among people who only meet at political events. Kinship is practised and performed in Black feminist communities today by means such as digital networking, engaging

in shared political activities and by creating safe spaces for each other. In the Black queer community associated with the Ballroom culture of the 1970s, chosen families are essential for creating spaces where people can be free from discrimination and marginalisation. 'Houses' and 'families' are usually created among long-time friends who are part of a Black queer or trans community in order to give mutual support, offer shelter and protect each other from physical and psychological harm (Bailey 2014).

When it comes to the chosen family form of sisterhoods (sisterhoods that go beyond blood ties) there are many diverse cultural examples. No clear root can be identified; sisterhoods exist in one form or another everywhere around the globe. But in many examples, sisterhoods were created first to protect women from discrimination and physical danger, and this is also the case for Black feminist collectives. The historian Emily Honig (1985) studied communities of women workers in the Shanghai cotton mills from 1919 to 1949 and found that sisterhoods were created to protect women workers from getting robbed or raped by gangsters on their way home. Tight knots of solidarity and mutual aid formed in response.

Sisterhood has been highly politicised since the 1960s and 1970s, and its emphasis on horizontal relations among equals has been stressed. In those decades, a politics of sisterhood was created through the feminist and Black and Civil Rights movement in the USA (Lorde 2012). In this context, it traces its roots to African American traditions where, since slavery, Black people would refer to each other as 'sister' and 'brother' in church and elsewhere to state their connectedness and mutual respect (Hewitt 1988, Lugones & Rosezelle 1995). Kinship thus also informs a political dimension of Afrodiasporic identity.

This study traces identification practices of a global Black and African diaspora. African diaspora has been thoroughly examined from a cultural studies or historical perspective, but there has been little engaging in ethnographic research and the meanings of the diaspora for people themselves. My contribution is thus to add an ethnographic point of view which focuses on how diaspora is practised and understood in human lives. I analyse practices of travelling to London or Paris but also journeys to African countries of origin to understand how Afrodiasporic identities are created and developed. And I focus on the transnational practices of Black activists.

In Germany it was not until the 1980s and the emergence of mostly feminist Afro-German movements (Chapter 9) that the term '*Schwarz*' (Black) began to circulate widely among Afrodescendant people. For the construction of a Black German identity and community, transnational exchanges and the spread of cultural models from one place to another are essential: from Black music to African American and feminist activist practices (e.g. life storytelling, anti-racist activism), these have all been aspects that helped in the construction of identities for the interlocutors of

this thesis and are crucial for understanding Black German political movements as transnational.

Oxana and Layla connect to Blackness and African diaspora in movement. They are transnationally very mobile, live between New York and Berlin and travel to various international events and conferences worldwide, always with a focus on Black and feminist events and with the wish to connect to the global African diaspora and to Black and feminist activists. Mobility also plays a key role in Oxana's profession. As a dancer and activist, she chooses to narrate the lives of Black and marginalised female historical figures through her dance performances, accompanied by her partner Layla. The practice of mobility in time and place, moving their bodies as well as moving transnationally, is vital to Oxana and Layla's African diasporic identity – through their work and travel they connect to a global Black community. But their identification with Blackness is neither totally hybrid nor is it totally detached from place. Growing up in Germany, Oxana was greatly influenced by the Afro-German movement of the 1980s and began to identify as Afro-German because of books like *Showing Our Colours: Afro-German Women Speak Out* (1986), while also starting to identify as Black through American influences. Growing up in Berlin and Paris, Layla also became acquainted with the Afro-German movement and with Black German activist May Ayim. So, these women practise hybrid as well as emplaced Afrodiasporic identity (Chapters 9 and 10).

Cultural theorist Paul Gilroy (1993) shows how Pan-African ideals – a political concept based on the idea of the unity of all people of African descent as a strategy to fight racist and colonial systems of oppression – formed by African American and Caribbean intellectuals circulated in place and time between Africa, America and Europe. Gilroy explains how important it is to focus on historical and national particularities in the development of African diaspora cultures and the concept of race and race relations but also on how these particularities have travelled and influenced other parts of the world. Human mobility for Gilroy remains the most important factor in the creation of a diaspora consciousness. Gilroy underlines the potential of transformation through travel, the potential to overcome socially and culturally constructed categories of race by getting to know other national contexts and traditions. But his analysis is more nuanced than simply stating these facts. For instance, he acknowledges that travel (to both Europe and Africa) made many African American travellers realise how attached they were to the category of national belonging, how travelling helped them grasp that they are American and are also seen and perceived as such in other countries. In this way, a feeling that they were often denied in the USA was able to develop elsewhere.

Gordon and Anderson, on the other hand, in their paper 'The African Diaspora: Toward an Ethnography of Diasporic Identification' (1999), stress how much place matters in the development of African diaspora consciousness and practice. In doing so they also criticise the then prominent position of 'hybridity' for how it con-

ceptualised diaspora, which decentred the notion of communities as territorial and bounded and instead focused on the diffuse and multi-centred character of identity (Hall 1990). These authors call upon anthropologists to study the conditions (local, national, historical) under which a person comes to identify as 'Black' as well as to identify with a global Black or African diaspora in different places. Gordon and Anderson also proposed that Blackness was not only a racial identity commonly ascribed to people with African origins but that the cultural dimension was just as important:

> It became conceptualised not simply as a racial entity but as a cultural community dynamically uniting Africa and its communities in displacement through commonalities of African cultural practice and worldview. (Gordon and Anderson 1999, p. 285)

It is this practical element, people practising a cultural and political identification/affiliation, that creates African diaspora and Blackness.

Both Gordon and Anderson (1999) and Gilroy (1993) dismiss an ontological essentialism according to which African-ness is seen as a fixed and bounded identity shared by all people of African descent; but they also reject an anti-essentialist claim, advancing instead a hybrid notion of diaspora. In order to include both the practices and imaginaries of African diaspora, Gordon and Anderson (1999) call for ethnographic investigation focusing on how individuals and groups participate in diaspora communities. Through my own ethnographic approach, it becomes possible to engage with both hybrid and essentialist understandings of diaspora as these are practised by people. The same person can use hybrid as well as essentialist visions of doing diasporic identity. Essentialist practices of doing diaspora, such as underlining one's African-ness through speech or dress, can serve specific objectives such as connecting to a community (family, political network, friendship circle, generational peers) or underlining a self-identification which has become important in that particular moment. That does not prevent diasporic identity from being understood or practised in a hybrid manner by the women in this research. A reference to shared African-ness with others accounts for both resemblance and difference; according to context and situation, one or the other will be in the foreground. Cultural differences can be celebrated while still pointing out a shared identification as Black. Pointing to differences within Blackness – differences relating to nationality, ethnicity, gender or class, for example – can serve specific political objectives – for example in deconstructing racism that is based on homogenising practices.

Outline of chapters

My ethnography analyses the process of coming of age as person of African descent in Germany, and in particular of women who are part of the second generation born in the 1980s, children of (an) African migrant parent(s). It analyses their practices of identifying with a global Black diaspora and, on an intimate level, their practices of making kinship. Each chapter describes different aspects in the process of becoming an adult and shows the importance of time, place and socioeconomic background in the development of political identities or the role of travel in defining the 'origins' of the five women, who will be introduced in detail over the course of this book. The research includes different spatial scales to analyse diverse articulations of diasporic identities: The national and the local level are at the centre in Part I. How does the national and the local (city/region) context contribute to the development of particular Afrodiasporic practices? In Part II, which focuses on travelling to 'origins', diasporic practice is analysed in its transnational context, focusing on family relations between countries. Part III then looks at Afrodiasporic practice in its global articulations by focusing on political activism and the career of two globetrotting Afro-German activist-artists.

In Part I (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5), I explore the African diaspora historically and ethnographically down the generations in Germany. I discuss 'The history of African diaspora in Germany' in Chapter 2, considering how African migration and, with it, African diaspora organisations emerged – from colonialism down to the present day. I focus on the history of political organisation and the emergence of Afrodiasporic political communities from the end of the nineteenth to the twenty-first century and analyse the importance that American influences after World War II had on the formation of Afro-German organisations starting in the 1980s. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I examine ethnographically the importance of inter- and intragenerational relations in the process of coming of age as a person of African descent in Germany. I consider the lives of Aminata Camara, her friend Maya B. and Lafia T. in Chapter 3 'Growing up in Frankfurt'. It explores their experiences of dancing and dating while diving into the American GI club scene that still existed then in and around Frankfurt, and how these experiences were crucial in enabling Aminata and Maya to form their first identifications with a Black community as teenagers and young women. Then comes the story of Lafia T., who grew up in Frankfurt around the same time as Aminata and Maya but frequented different places and spaces in the city. For Lafia the process of identifying with her Senegalese origins was handled differently than for Aminata with her Guinean origins or Maya with her Sierra Leonean roots. Chapter 4, 'Family affairs', follows Aminata's process of identifying as a 'Black' adult woman, outlines the importance of the digital world in the process and shows us what identifying as Black German woman means and entails in practice. In this chapter, we are also introduced to Aminata's father, Lamine Camara, who does not

identify as Black but as Guinean with a German passport. The comparison of the political trajectories of father and daughter give ample example about *centred* and *decentred* diasporic practices. Chapter 5, 'Racism and its intersection with class and gender', looks at how Aminata and her father perceive and live with racism/racialisation and being 'migrantised'. It deals with their experiences with and strategies against racism and racialisation, and their hopes and fears for their children and grandchildren.

Part II (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) follows the travels of my interlocutors and considers how the practice of travelling is used to connect to transnational family and to an Afrodiasporic heritage through lived experience. I examine how the women of this study use their travel experiences to connect with a (sometimes unknown) family history and how the experience fuels their self-perceptions as Germans of African descent. Practices of caring for themselves and others are crucial in becoming part of their transnational or chosen families. Their travels and stays in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal become an opportunity to experience, explore and practise cultural skills and aspects of their selves that are often in the background of their lives in Germany, where they are to various degrees involved (or not) in West African communities. In Chapter 6 we follow Maya as she travels first within Europe to connect to larger Afroeuropean communities and later to Nigeria, where she travelled on a work placement and to experience life in a West African country. Chapter 7 is about Lafia's first trip to Senegal. It deals with her growing interest in getting to know her Senegalese heritage and examines her and her kin's efforts to build mutual relations. In Chapter 8, Aminata travels to Ghana with her husband, children and stepfather. They visit her husband's mother and extended kin and seek to initiate their children into their West African heritage. Negotiating care arrangements (for children and older parents) is a crucial part of this travel.

Chapters 9 and 10 form the last part of this study, and there I turn from the personal kinship network back to the political collective and present two more women. It is through Oxana Chi and Layla Zami that I explore the world of Afro-German and feminist activism. What I aim at showing in Chapter 9 'Life storytelling as Black and feminist political practice' and 10 'Oxana & Layla's travelling life stories: Connecting to global Blackness in mobility' is that life storytelling and sharing is a crucial part of making a Black activist self and forging Black political community on a global level and is a practice rooted in a long and varied history of resistance.

Another important aspect of building a Black community is mobility, which I explore through the transnational and motile lives of the activist couple. Furthermore, by making the last part about life stories and activism, I connect the end of this thesis to its beginning, where I start with the tale of Tiffany López Ganet, a young Black Spanish researcher who narrated her life in a panel at the Afroeuropeans conference in Portugal in 2019, the conference where I both started my fieldwork in 2017 and ended it in summer 2019.

The overall conclusion brings together the central arguments of each chapter and attempts to see how far kinship relations and middle classness are constitutive for the makings of Afrodiasporic identities of the millennial women in this research.

Part I: Diasporic Generations

Throughout history, there have been various waves of African and Afrodiasporic mobilities towards Germany, ranging from colonial mobilities from 1880 to 1919, to diverse student mobilities since the 1950s, as well as African Americans who came to Germany as students, teachers and soldiers. At various points, organisations were founded and networks created. Some people only stayed for a little while before going back or moving on to another country; others stayed, founded families and have now been at home in Germany for many generations.

This part of the thesis is about the different generations of Afrodiasporic people who came to live in Germany. First, I will give a macrohistorical view of the history of African migration and diaspora organisation in Germany from 1880, the beginning of German colonialism, until the 1980s and the development of new Afro-German organisations (Chapter 2). In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I employ a microhistorical and ethnographic perspective to consider life for Afrodescendant people in Germany today. This ethnographic part will look more deeply into everyday experiences and performances of Afrodiasporic identity by focusing on the lives of Aminata Camara, her father Lamine Camara, Maya B. and Lafia T. who belong to the same age group as Aminata and also grew up in Frankfurt as Germans of African descent. I will also consider how class and race matter for different generations who grew up in different historical and geographical contexts. The scale that I take into consideration to study diasporic identities in this part is the national and local level.

By comparing the life stories of Aminata, Maya and Lafia, it becomes clearer what similarities and differences there can be within a same generation growing up in the same city. For Aminata and Maya, growing up with the cultural heritage of German mothers and West African fathers was normal. Lafia shows us a different view on diasporic identity. For a long time as a young girl and a teenager, her wish was to not deal or not have to deal with her Senegalese origins and her father, nor with Blackness. Dealing with political Blackness and with her own origins was something that occurred later for Lafia then for Aminata or Maya, for different reasons. Aminata, for instance, became active in Black political networks as an adult, whereas the other two did not become politically active but chose different strategies to confront racialisation. The comparison of individual life stories also demonstrates how people from different generations of same family understand and practise diasporic belonging and how this understanding and practice is interrelated

with place, age and gender. What was the political atmosphere like when Lamine Camara came to Germany, and how did that influence his own trajectory and diasporic involvement? What was it like to grow up in Guinea in the 1960s? And what were the times like when Aminata became politicised? In terms of family migration history, the people I study are first and second generation,[1] but to what bigger historical generational cohorts do they belong? The political diasporic practices of father and daughter are linked to experiences of Germany and Guinea at specific historical moments and shaped by socialisation processes in different countries. The comparison between father and daughter also reveals how a relation to a country of 'origin' can change for the second generation. Whereas Aminata's father, Lamine Camara, says of himself that he is Guinean with a German passport, for his daughter things are different. She feels rooted in Germany and Frankfurt, where she has always lived and where she was socialised – but she is also Guinean and African, and feels particularly connected to other young Afrodescendant people who grew up in Frankfurt or cities elsewhere in Europe.

Generation is important both in terms of intrafamily relations and as historically grounded experiences of a cohort of people from the same age group. It does not only matter genealogically (i.e. the contrasts between children and parents) (Nash 1978) but also with regard to the shared historical circumstances and lived experience of people of more or less the same age group (Mannheim 1928, Sayad 1979, Bourdieu 1988, Eisenstadt 1971, Eckstein 2006, Purhonen 2016). When can we speak of a generation? There are two ways of using the concept analytically, and their meanings are interconnected: First, it can be applied in a genealogical sense, in reference to different positions in a system of kinship, such as relations between parents and children. The second sense is that of social and cultural generations and pertains to the collective identity of a group of people who, through shared experiences, create an 'us' (Purhonen 2016). It is also because each social generation lives through different times and events that differences between genealogical generations emerge. It is not age in itself which marks a generation but the different events that accompanied a cohort's coming of age. The sociologist Karl Mannheim wrote about the importance of social generations for sociological analysis in 1928. He explained that a generation was always extremely heterogeneous in terms of nationality, social status/class, gender and so on, but nonetheless under certain conditions, where there had been significant social change that had influenced the living conditions in such a degree that a real distinction was established between older and younger people, it becomes possible to speak of a generation.

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1   I use the term 'second generation' only in reference to the genealogical position. I.e. the second generation are the children of members of the first generation. Only the first generation migrated and not the second, which is why I oppose the term second generation 'migrant', as it contributes to racialised othering.

My participants' parents' coming of age can be viewed against the backdrop of the 1968 student revolution, a period of uprisings against authoritarian regimes and, particularly in Germany, an uprising against the institutional and often familial silence regarding the Nazi crimes of the Second World War. In terms of the African diaspora in Germany, the parents of my participants were the generation which lived through the decolonisation period and grew up in early postcolonial countries. Many people from African countries came to Germany in the 1960s and 1970s on student scholarships provided by both East and West Germany (see Chapter 2).

In the case of the young adults that I work with, we usually speak of 'Generation Y' or 'millennials', people who were children or teenagers at the turn of the millennium in 2000. The millennial generation is marked by massive changes in technology with new modes of communication and mobility. Politically, this generation lived through the end of the Cold War and the unification of Germany in the 1990s as well as by 9/11 and the following 'War on Terror' pronounced by the USA and its allies. But this is concerns the meso and macro levels. How can a generation be defined at the micro level, or how do these and other events or other things matter for people born around the same time in a same place? Answering that question helps us understand how a particular Afrodiasporic identity is created for young Afrodescendant women in Germany today and how class, gender and race are constructed through shared lived experience. On a micro level, it is other more mundane things that account for the feeling of being part of a particular generation. The fact of growing up in the same city, frequenting the same spots in the city, parks, clubs, having gone to the same school, sharing the same tastes in music – in general having shared memories of childhood and teenage years – can be very important in terms of feeling part of a generation. Socially, for the cases that I will present here, the aspect of feeling connected through a shared club culture as teenagers and young adults still creates a certain nostalgia and a sense of community today: At a playground in Frankfurt with her son in autumn 2017, Aminata spoke to another mother and told me afterwards that she seemed familiar. It turned out she also hung out at the same clubs in the past. These club spaces are now becoming symbols of an idealised past, places that capture the feeling of being part of the same generation.

Chapter 2 'The History of African diaspora in Germany' provides a historical overview of African migration and diaspora organisation in Germany. It shows the beginnings of African diaspora organisations in Germany after 1880, when people from then German colonies such as Cameroon or Togo came as colonial subjects. Following the disruption of the two World Wars, which caused the dissolution of the first diaspora organisations, new waves of African students and guest workers starting in the 1960s led to the emergence of new diaspora organisations, which were significantly influenced by the political events of the times.

Chapter 3, 'Growing up in Frankfurt', examines the importance of shared experience at a specific time and place in the creation of generation. Through Aminata's

and Maya's lives, we come to understand how they dealt with their African descent in the context of their families and how important American culture in Frankfurt (imported together with the US military) was for Afrodescendant women, in particular. Lafia's story gives us another angle. She grew up with less contact to her father and Senegalese cultural practice was not part of her everyday life.

Chapter 4, 'Family affairs – An intergenerational approach to diaspora', then takes intrafamily dynamics as its centre point as it allows us to compare how diasporic identity shifts through time and place. This chapter focuses on Aminata's politicisation process and introduces her father, Lamine Camara, describing how he came to Germany in the 1970s and became involved in Guinean politics from the diaspora. I argue that, despite all the differences between the trajectories and political practices of father and daughter, both practise a *centred* as well as a *decentred* vision of diaspora.

Chapter 5, 'Racism and its intersection with class and gender', considers how Aminata and her father perceive and live with racism and being racialised, and how reflections on their middle-class position affect their experiences in this area. It contrasts how Aminata's experiences of racialisation motivate her political activism in Germany with the different factors that drive her father's political activity and how he distances himself from being a racialised subject in Germany.

2. A history of African diaspora in Germany

The first African diaspora that amounted to more than just a few individuals coming to Germany can be traced back to the 1884 Berlin Conference, when the German Reich began to colonise parts of the African continent. In this chapter I give a macro-historical perspective of African diasporas in Germany to contextualise the research on individual lives historically. I analyse when and why people from different African countries organised politically across nationalities, taking the diverse historical circumstances into account. This chapter demonstrates how Black political activism emerged in Germany and what events and people influenced the various activist movements. It is also important for understanding the circumstances under which many of the African parents of my interlocutors came to Germany – as students.

Several historical periods have been important for the formation and development of African diasporas in Germany. In this chapter I will focus on three: The first is European colonialism/imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century, when people from various African countries which had been colonised by Germany (parts of today's Togo, Cameroon, Namibia and Tanzania) started to come to Germany in large numbers. I explore how African diaspora networks started to emerge in Germany and how they were affected by World Wars I and II and go on to explore the new flows of African (student) migration to East and West Germany since the 1950s and the role of the occupation of American troops for Germany's political and cultural landscapes after 1945. The emergence of newer Afrodiasporic organisations since the 1980s will be explored at the end of this chapter, which also includes an overview of the landscape of African diaspora and Black organisations in Germany today.

The beginning and end of the first African diaspora (1880–1945)

From the earliest days of German colonialism there was a very limited influx of migrants from African countries such as today's Cameroon or Namibia, both of which were German colonies until 1918. Detailed studies of African migration and diaspora organisation to Germany are scarce but more have gradually begun to appear since 2000. One of the most noteworthy, because of the long historical timescale it cov-

ers, is Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft's *Black Germany: The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community, 1884–1960* (2013). Aitken, a professor of Imperial History and Rosenhaft, a professor of German Historical Studies, both of whom are based in the United Kingdom, retrace the lives and careers of Cameroonians who arrived in Germany from former German colonies as early as 1884. The authors frame their work in terms of the making of a diaspora community in Germany as 'Black', a community that goes beyond the ties of nationality of Africans in Germany to a more political awareness of being racially marked and suffering from everyday and institutional racism in German and European societies as people of African descent. Aitken and Rosenhaft document a shift of attitudes towards the early arrivals from Africa to Germany between 1880 and 1914. The way they were treated shifted from curiosity and, in most cases, respect to discrimination based on the growing influence of race ideology in Europe.

The African migrants came to Germany at a time when race theories were already flourishing, and the use of racial ideologies based on the categorisation of people according to phenotypical characteristics, supported by pseudo-scientific racism, was already a widespread phenomenon in society at large (Wieviorka 1998). Fatima El-Tayeb (2001) traces the emergence of race theories and racism in Germany from the fifteenth century onwards and notes its effects on German colonialism, finding political and social exclusion of Black people in Germany already long before the era of Nazism. Since the Enlightenment, race theories had been developed in various sciences, leading to new forms of scientifically supported racism in Europe – and Germany in particular. Here particularly powerful currents of racism were associated with social Darwinism and eugenics, as represented by people such as Ludwig Woltmann (1899) or Alfred Ploetz (1895) in the late nineteenth century, who built their ideas around the thought of French, English and American race theorists such as Arthur de Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain. The pseudo-science of phrenology – which claimed to be able to determine psychological characteristics based on the form of a person's skull – had already emerged in Germany in the work of Franz Joseph Gall and Johann Gaspar Spurzheim at the start of the nineteenth century. In Germany, racist ideology was also aligned with the growing nationalism that followed the unification of the German Reich in 1871, and Germany espoused a rhetoric of ethnic community as the foundation for the nation (Brubaker 1994, Wieviorka 1998).

Cameroon was one of four territories acknowledged as a German colony by the European colonising powers at the Berlin Conference in 1884. Togo, German South West Africa (now Namibia), and German East Africa (now Tanzania) were also given the status of German colonies in 1884. The first Africans who came to Germany since that date were usually part of a West African cosmopolitan elite. In Cameroon, this meant children of the Duala or other regional elites. They came as students or apprentices, often with the idea of returning to their home countries after receiving an

education. Soon after the first Africans arrived from the colonies to Germany after 1885, a diasporic community building beyond ethnic and national boundaries developed. A shared consciousness arose of experiences as Africans and colonial subjects in Germany:

> [T]he articulation of a sense of connectedness with other black people that reaches out from local relations to envision black interest and identity as something shared across the globe. This is a political vision, but in the lives of our subjects and their contemporaries (Africans and their offspring in Germany between 1880–1960) it was typically something that arose out of everyday experience and was worked out in concrete encounters that called for practices of negotiation and translation. (Aitken & Rosenhaft 2013, p. 194)

Aitken and Rosencraft describe the two-fold nature of the making of Black identity. One side of the process is the political vision of community-building among people of African descent, while the other aspect emerges out of everyday experiences of racism in which people are marked as homogenously black, forcing them to connect for mutual support. The building of an African diaspora community in Germany was a reaction to a shared experience of discrimination and an attempt to build solidarity between people who had come to Germany mostly on their own, without their families. Most Africans were to be found in and around bigger cities such as Hamburg and Berlin, but there were also some in Cologne, Frankfurt, Hanover and Munich. Hamburg was an attractive destination for African men because of its port. Many Africans would arrive in that city, which also offered job opportunities for African and Asian seamen at the docks.

According to the Aitken and Rosenhaft's research, most Africans lived in close proximity and were especially to be found in the working-class neighbourhoods, which indicates a loss of status loss through international migration, as most of them came from wealthier families.

Berlin was the centre of African life in Germany. Some of the people Aitken and Rosenhaft present found employment at the University's Department of African Languages, and many hoped to find work in the film and entertainment industry. In the 1920s, Berlin was already a very cosmopolitan capital with many non-native Berliners living there. Administratively, it was also a strategic place for Africans because of the presence of the German Foreign Office and the Department of Colonial Affairs. They suggest that the African population was around 200–300 (Aitken and Rosenhaft 2013, p. 123) between the wars in Berlin, primarily Cameroonians and their German-born children.

African colonial subjects in Germany after World War I – the emergence of formal organisations

After World War I, the situation for Africans who stayed on in Germany as ex-colonial subjects became increasingly difficult both economically and in terms of their legal status. It was harder to remain in contact with their native countries once the former German colonial territories were handed over to the French and British. This made organisation across ethnic or national boundaries more necessary to prevent those who stayed from being isolated. One such formalised African community organisation, with members of diverse African countries living all over Germany, was the African Welfare Association (*Afrikanischer Hilfsverein – AH*). The AH was officially created in Hamburg in 1918 and was open to anybody of African heritage. The first clause of its statue read: 'Every member of our black race and every person of colour can be a member' (quoted in Aitken & Rosenhaft 2013, p. 129). In 1918, its membership included 32 men, mostly Cameroonian Duala, but also men from Togo, Liberia and the Virgin Islands; later on, people from Sierra Leone and the USA joined. The objective of the organisation was the provision of support and mutual aid – both political and economic: '[I]t looked to offer practical and financial help as well as support for members in their dealings with the German authorities, in the search for employment and in the case of the death of a family member' (ibid.). The AH had ceased to exist by 1922 because most of its powerful members had left the country or died. But before that, AH members had organised several campaigns for the rights of Afrodescendant people in Germany.

Following World War I, many former African colonial subjects who remained in Germany began to experience a process of downward social mobility: Members of the elite in their home countries, the growth of racial discrimination made it all but impossible for them to find jobs that fitted their socioeconomic and cultural status, and they were pushed into 'liminal occupations, including petty trading, hustling and stage performance of various kinds' (Aitken & Rosenhaft 2013, p. 15).

At the same time, Aitken and Rosenhaft also document a growing politisation and the forging of alliances with pan-African, communist and socialist communities in France, the USA and Russia. When describing the emergence of political African diaspora organisations, it is interesting to note the role the international communist movement played in the development of pan-African and Black political activism, which often leaned towards communist and socialist ideals. Aitken and Rosenhaft note that

> the context for African involvement in political organisations was provided by anti-imperialist and anti-colonial projects that developed in the ambit of the Communist International. German communist Willi Münzenberg who was involved in the League Against Imperialism (LAI – Liga gegen koloniale Unter-

drückung) established contacts with Africans in Berlin and by 1926 there were African members in the League whose objective it was to fight against colonial oppression. (2013, p. 204)

After the emergence of the LAI in 1927,[1] several African diaspora organisations were founded in Germany, for example the German League for the Defence of the Negro Race (LzVN) which was established in 1929 by Duala men who had been trained by the Comintern, which was at that time increasingly fusing race and class struggles in its policies. This formalisation of organisations facilitated transborder contact with political groups from other countries such as the LDRN (League for the Defense of the Rights of the Negro Race – founded in Paris in 1927 by Malian anticolonialist Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté). The demands of the German-led organisations ranged from improving the living conditions of Afrodescendant people in Germany and recognising them as German citizens and not foreigners, to supporting decolonial movements in Africa (Aitken & Rosenhaft 2013, DHM 2016). One member of that generation of African socialist activists was Joseph Bilé, who came to Germany from Douala, Cameroon to train as an engineer and was cut off from his family when World War I broke out; he failed to return due to lack of funding and remained in Germany and Austria. He became a spokesperson for the LzVN and the LAI and formally joined the KPD (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, Communist Party of Germany*) in 1930. He went to the first International Congress of Negro Workers in Hamburg in 1930, which was attended by prominent Black liberation activists. Soon after that, Bilé visited Moscow to strengthen his links with communist organisations there. In his function as member at LzVN and LAI, he supported newly arriving African students in Berlin (Aitken and Rosenhaft 2013).

Very few Africans in Germany succeeded in their efforts to acquire German citizenship (*Reichsnationalität*) before World War I and the authorities often advised against accepting their demands, stressing that citizenship was usually reserved for white people from Germany (Aitken and Rosenhaft 2013). After World War I, a unified German citizenship was established. Before then, German nationality *Reichsangehörigkeit* (citizenship of the empire) was granted to those who held citizenship of an individual German state (*Landesangehörigkeit*). After 1919 and the loss of colonial subjecthood for Africans in Germany, the objection to granting citizenship because of race was more often voiced openly – as here in the 1930s: 'An official in the Munich Interior Ministry observed: Kohl is a Negro. In my view there must be fundamental reservations against naturalising coloureds' (quoted in Aitken & Rosenhaft 2013, p. 100). Or in this statement from other state officials: '[I]t hardly needs saying that

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1   It was founded at the World Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in Brussels in 1927, which was attended by 174 delegates representing 134 organisations from all over the world.

the naturalisation of coloureds is undesirable' (ibid.). Mixed Cameroonian-German couples often encountered administrative obstacles when they wanted to get married in the 'mother country'. If a German woman married a foreign national, she and the children would lose German citizenship and automatically be granted the citizenship of her husband. Because of that rule, the Cameroonian men would often ask for German citizenship or naturalisation before marriage, but this could take a long time and was not guaranteed at all – especially after the nationality law reform of 1918, which required the approval of local as well as national government for granting naturalisation.

One debate that made Africans the target of racism concerned the occupation of the Rhineland by French troops after World War I, and especially the presence of French colonial troops and the accompanying 'Black Shame' (*Schwarze Schmach*) campaign, which contributed to the spread of racism against Black people in Germany. Soon after the Armistice in November 1918, demilitarising measures were enforced on Germany, and American, Belgian and French soldiers occupied German territories in the Rhine region. France was the major occupying power and installed troops on three-quarters of the occupied land, administered from the city of Mainz. The Rhineland occupation was an outcome of the treaty of Versailles and lasted from 1918 until 1930 (with remilitarisation and occupation by the Nazi regime in 1936). On 10 January 1920, the Versailles Treaty came into effect. It proclaimed Germany as solely responsible for the war and required Germany to pay compensation. In 1922, Germany fell behind on reparation payments. The French occupation was generally disliked by the German population. Many Germans in the Rhineland felt humiliated by the French troops on an everyday basis, as the French government had taken control over factories and much of public life. And in an age of growing racial ideology the presence of French colonial soldiers from Senegal, Morocco, Algeria and Madagascar, who made up about 20 per cent of the occupying force, was perceived as especially 'aggravating'. (Constant 2019)

The incident that culminated in the 'Black Shame' campaign – a national and then international propaganda campaign against French occupation – took place on 7 April 1920 in Frankfurt. Moroccan soldiers who felt threatened by protesting people in the street began to shoot. Already before that incident, stereotypes of Black soldiers and stories of their killing and raping did exist in the public sphere, but this was the landmark event that triggered the campaign. Initially, the Black Shame campaign was a parliamentary campaign that was launched a few weeks after the deadly incident with the Moroccan troops. The parliamentary protest was soon joined by all kinds of organisations and unions. The only German parties not involved in the protest were the left wing Independent Social Democrats (USPD) and the communist KPD. The protesters used terms such as 'coloured', 'negro race' and 'black plague' to refer to people of African descent (Wigger 2017, p. 4). The historian Iris Wigger analyses the campaign in her book *The 'Black Horror on the Rhine': Intersections of Race,*

Nation, Gender and Class in 1920s Germany (2017). Soon the campaign reached an international public as well, with newspapers calling for the 'solidarity of all civilised people' against the 'desecration of the white race' (Wigger 2017, p. 5). The protests were accompanied by extremely racist and stereotypical images on flyers, newspapers and magazines, portraying African soldiers as brutes and rapists. The extreme right in Germany took advantage of the moment and accused France of committing crimes against the white race, publishing yet more caricatures. The campaign was also used to try to unite all Germans, no matter their political colour, against a common enemy and threat:

> The Black Shame in this way proved a powerful ideology of racialised social inclusion through exclusion [...] in this case, a mode of social integration based on the degradation and social exclusion of 'black troops' as racialised 'Others.' (Wigger 2017, p. 6)

Several novels were published at the time using the 'Black Shame' of French occupation as a plot element to demand 'national unity in times of crisis' (Wigger 2017, p. 85). Although the extreme right were the loudest, it was not only they who became vocal. Socialists who were against the occupation regime also used the incident to mark their opposition to the presence of French forces. And they received international support. The pictures painted of the colonial troops from groups on the extreme right and left were very similar. Both presented them as coming from countries that were characterised as equally barbaric and ill-behaved. The results were massive international campaigns – both racist and sexist – against the use of colonial troops, but more especially against African troops, who were defamed as savages who could not help following their sexual instincts and therefore a danger for the docile German woman, who needed to be protected. The presence of colonial troops was represented as a 'double humiliation' – not only was Germany occupied and its sovereignty and territory stolen, but the occupiers were Africans. In the popular racial ideology of the time, this meant an attack on the imagined 'racial purity' of the nation. Soon elements of the British, Italian and US media began to condemn the presence of Black troops in Germany. Although France's government was relatively quick to react, removing most of its colonial troops from Germany after the April incident, the major propaganda campaign continued until 1922 and even after that on a smaller scale.

The same means were reused by the Nazis after 1933 to justify racist policies not only against the Jewish population but also against everyone who was considered non-white. One of the policies included the drastic measure of sterilising the children born from French colonial soldiers and German women, known as the 'Rhineland children'. In 1937, German physicians approved the sterilisation of almost 400 of those children on the basis of their 'foreign racial features' (Wigger

2017, p. 11). Research by the historian Reiner Pommerin (1979) has uncovered 385 such sterilisations. This extreme measure gives a hint of how life for a person of African descent must have been in Germany following the end of World War I, with the rise of eugenics and 'the dogma of racial hygiene' (Wigger 2017, p. 11).

People of African descent under the Nazi regime (1933–1945)

The Nazi regime quickly disrupted pan-African political activities (for example by proscribing the LzVN and banning its activists from Germany). The Hamburg section of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers office was forced out of Germany in 1933 and its director, the famous pan-African and decolonial theorist George Padmore, was deported to France; the LAI and LzVN were shut down permanently, former leaders like Victor Bell (a Cameroonian native) threatened by the Nazi regime (Aitken and Rosenhaft 2013). Many Cameroonian-Germans studied by Aitken and Rosenhaft went into exile in Paris, where they encountered a larger and more organised Black political community of citizens of various African countries to which they could turn to for support. Those who had been active in politics could continue to do so in France.

Some returned to Cameroon from Paris, some stayed on in France. Hitler's project of building an Aryan ethnic community and forcibly excluding or exterminating all those marked as dangerous to the purity of the envisaged ethno-racial *Volksgemeinschaft* (National Community) forced people of African descent into a very marginal position in society. Each group that the Nazi government defined as a threat to racial purity was targeted by different laws and strategies; the most horrific ones being the genocide of the Jews. The Nuremberg laws (also known as Race laws or Aryan laws) of 1935 which comprised the 'Blood Protection Act' (*Blutschutzgesetz*) and the 'Reich Citizenship Act' (*Reichsbürgergesetz*) included not only racist policies targeting Jewish people but also, to a lesser degree, 'coloured races' (people of non-European descent). A marriage ban between those and 'Aryan' Germans was installed. These laws were inspired by race segregation laws in the American South at the time (Brechtken et al. 2017, Essner 2017).

During the war there were several cases of Africans and Germans of African descent being sent to concentration camps – often because they had (or were alleged to have) relationships with white Germans (women or men) (Campt 2004, Aitken and Rosenhaft 2013). As a result of the new citizenship laws, people characterised as 'non-Aryan' were excluded from all forms of state aid, the right to citizenship was revoked based on racial status, and everyday forms of racism increased considerably (Pommerin 1979). At that time, many people of African descent could only find employment performing as part of the colonial film and entertainment industry; many had lost their former jobs due to a law that made it possible to remove 'non-Aryans' to make place for 'Aryans' (Aitken & Rosenhaft 2013, p. 245).

Written life histories of Germans of African descent and how they lived and survived in the Third Reich give accounts of the process of coming of age and subject formation in a time of extreme institutionalised racism. German-born Theodor Wonja Michael (who had a Cameroonian father and a German mother) describes in his autobiography, *Black German: An Afro-German Life in the Twentieth Century* (Michael 2015), how he lost his job because he was considered 'too foreign' – though he had never lived anywhere other than Germany! Theodor grew up during the Third Reich. As a child he acted in so-called *Völkerschauen*, shows that displayed foreign people as exotic and primitive and which often took place in zoological gardens, to strengthen the racist stereotype of non-white people as closer to nature (Bancel et al. 2004). During World War II, he only managed to find employment as an actor in colonial movies, where he had to play a stereotypical 'African'. Although there was a general ban on Black performers, there were also exceptions, because African performers were deemed 'necessary' in colonial films. The movie sets became places of encounter for Africans from various countries and Germans of African descent.

Another life story is told by the German-Liberian writer and editor Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi in his autobiography, *Destined to Witness: Growing up Black in Nazi Germany* (2010). He left Germany in 1948, first for Liberia and then for the USA, where he became editor-in-chief of the African American magazine *Ebony*. (Aminata's father referred to his story once during our interview. He did not know much about Black Germans, but he had read Massaquoi's memoirs.) Fasia Jansen, who was also German-Liberian, a songwriter and peace activist, grew up during World War II. In the biography written about her (she never wrote one herself), *Fasia – geliebte Rebellin*, Marina Achenbach (2004), the author and several other contributors, who were all friends with their subject, describe how Jansen was racially prosecuted in Nazi Germany and forced to work in a concentration camp kitchen.

Both Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi and Theodor Wonja Michael strongly identified as German and wanted to join the Hitler Youth. They were devastated when they were not allowed to do so. They were often erroneously referred to as 'Rhineland children', the name used for children of the French colonial soldiers and German women, which shows the general assumption in Germany at the time that a child of African descent could not have been born in Germany before 1918, even though Germany had then been a colonial power and Africans had lived in Germany.[2]

African diaspora organisations, which had already started to be disrupted soon after World War I because of Germany's loss of its colonies, had been completely dis-

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2   This positioning of people of African descent as outsiders happened after the war again when Black children were also referred to as 'occupation children' (*Besatzungskinder*). This time, the reference was to the children of African American soldiers, who were part of the allied armies occupying Germany, and German mothers (more on this in the section on the Afro-German movement in Chapter 9).

mantled by the end of World War II. But soon after 1945, new migration movements from various African countries as well as the occupation of US troops began to build a completely new landscape of African diaspora in Germany.

African diaspora in West and East Germany (1945–1980)

Two aspects of transnational history are important to understand the lives of my interlocutors: German women of African descent born in the 1980s. First of all, I want to explore the history of African student migration to Germany since the 1950s, as this is how some of the fathers of the women I work with came – they received student scholarships. Then, I explore the influences that the USA and its military had on postwar Germany, especially on the cultural landscape and the intellectual exchange that has taken place since the 1968 student revolts.

African migration and diaspora organisation in Germany since the 1950s

The policies towards African countries in Germany after World War II were much influenced by the Cold War and competition for recognition between the two Germanies. Although the loss of the German colonies after World War I had long been perceived as a humiliation, it became an advantage for Germany in the face of the decolonisation of Africa and Asia following World War II, allowing Germany to position itself as somehow a *neutral actor*, who had already lost its colonies a long time ago. Starting in the late 1950s, as the Cold War Germanies entered into a struggle for the attention of the newly independent states, Germany – East and West – became a popular destinations for post-independence African students and workers. And with the presence of international students and workers from the Global South, new African diaspora networks emerged, who worked on several issues within and outside Germany and formed diverse coalitions (DHM 2016). African migration to Germany back then was twofold: There was student migration and labour migration. As some of the African parents of my interlocutors came to Germany as students, the focus of this part will be on student migration.

African students from many different countries began to come both to West and East Germany as early as the 1950s. For many of them it was the wake of independence in their respective countries of origin, and they were often highly politicised. The historian Quinn Slobodian speaks of a 'battle for Afro-Asian students fought between the two republics' (2013, p. 646) which started in the early Cold War period with the separation of the two republics in 1949:

> The question for both Germanies was how to preserve control or at least influence, without colonialism, with success measured in the currency of diplomatic recognition and votes of support at the United Nations. (Slobodian 2013, p. 647)

The FRG (West Germany) started to offer large amounts of scholarships to non-aligned countries. By 1960 there were already over 9,000 spots for students from the South; the first people from African countries came from Egypt, Nigeria, Algeria and Guinea. By establishing these schemes, the government hoped to nurture pro-West German sentiment in these countries, helping West Germany to gain an international image as an open and cosmopolitan country (Slobodian 2013, 2008, Blumenau 2011). For the GDR (East Germany), the total number of African students in 1989 was 2,356, compared to 1,300 some ten years earlier. By 1989, for example, 651 Angolan students had completed a degree in the GDR and 224 were still enrolled. The Africans studying in East Germany had their scholarships taken over by the (originally West German) German Academic Exchange Service (*Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst*, DAAD) after 1989 (Schenck 2019). Most had come alone, as it was difficult to legally bring their families. Students were usually supposed to return after the completion of their degrees to transfer their skills and knowledge to their countries of origin, but not all of them did so. In the GDR, some stayed on after 1989 as asylum seekers (though not many were accepted as such) (Schenck 2019). Whereas West Germany liked to frame their scholarship programme in terms of humanitarian aid, East Germany framed it in terms of socialist solidarity and focused on students and workers of countries that were more positive towards communism (socialist and non-aligned).

The influx of international students allowed the formation of new supranational coalitions as well as national diaspora coalitions in both East and West Germany. Slobodian researched transnational activism in African and Asian student groups in West Germany from the 1950s to the 1970s and the influences these had on the emerging New Left in Germany and the 1968 generation (Slobodian 2008). In the wake of the 1955 Bandung Conference and the adoption of non-alignment as a third way beyond the East–West divide of the Cold War, international students (a Jamaican medical student and an Indian physicist) in Germany set up the Afro-Asian Student Union (AASU) in 1956. Other organisations founded at the time included two African student associations with a Pan-African vision: The ASUD – African Student Union of Germany (*Afrikanische Studentenunion Deutschlands*) was founded in 1961 in Munich by a Ghanaian student inspired by pan-Africanist W.E.B. du Bois. It united students from West and East Germany, as international students usually had more freedom to travel than East German citizens at that time. There was also a GDR-specific organisation: the UASA – Union of African students and workers (*Union der afrikanischen Studenten und Arbeiter in der DDR*), which was formed in 1960. The UASA aligned with other African organisations across the Soviet Union and in Western Europe and was very active in anti-racist work (Pugach 2019; Slobodian 2013).

Both Germanies tried to control and even undermine the activities of the international student organisations. For example, before giving scholarships to Algerian

students in 1958 (which was in the middle of the Algerian War of Independence), the West German Association of German students (VDS, *Verband Deutscher Studentenschaften*) advised the students that political activity was forbidden while they were studying in the FRG (Slobodian 2013). But there were still protests, and Arab students united with German students (especially with Socialist German Students Union) to organise protests from 1959 until the end of the war in 1962. The VDS itself became more politicised in the 1960s and criticised colonial wars in Angola (Slobodian 2013, 2008). Besides the UASA, most of the African students were members of National Student Groups (*Nationale Hochschulgruppen, NHG*). There were twenty-three African student groups as well as the pan-African UASA.

Due to the Hallstein doctrine, in effect from 1955 to 1970, which stated that the FRG would not conduct diplomatic relations with countries that officially recognised the GDR, it was complicated for the latter to develop relations with newly independent states in particular. The GDR therefore had an interest in keeping African students, even if many of them did organise in political dissent against their governments of origin soon after independence from European colonialism, including students from Nigeria, Guinea and Kenya (Pugach 2019). It is important to note that political activism was not only directed towards countries of origin. As well as drawing attention to and protesting against politics in their countries of origin, the organisations – especially the umbrella organisation UASA – also called out racism that Africans confronted in the GDR. In 1965, they published a letter which denounced racist violence. These charges were indeed acknowledged and taken seriously by GDR officials, who were afraid that the FRG would use that information for propaganda purposes (Pugach 2019). Although the GDR positioned itself as non-racist and anti-imperialist and saw emergent socialist African states as allies in the fight against Western imperialism, Africans living in East Germany were still confronted by everyday forms of racism and rejection, for instance when it came to questions of marriage, family and relationships.

Although scientific racism had been delegitimised following World War II and the crimes committed by the Nazis in the name of science, racism itself was by no means over. Instead, a pseudo-scientific racism was replaced with a racism that looked for essential differences between humans based on cultural background. Even though these differences were not explained using an evolutionary scheme in which white people were on top and Black people at the bottom of human evolution, the cultural distinctions were still based on phenotypical differences, and racist prejudices against Black people and People of Colour lingered (Wieviorka 1998, Fassin & Fassin 2009). The assumption that people of African descent were essentially culturally different from white people, no matter where they came from, was still widespread.

At the same time, as historian Sarah Pugach notes, the presence of African students became normal, and international student dorms would be popular hang-out

places for meet-ups and potential affairs of the heart (Pugach 2015). The historian Young-Sun Hong (2015) also looks at the flows of students from non-aligned and newly independent African and Asian states. Around 44,000 foreigners studied at East German universities and technical schools between 1949 and 1989. In the 1960s, many of them came from Ghana, Guinea and Mali, joined later by large numbers from Zanzibar and Cuba. Mostly they came to study medical professions, agriculture or engineering. The nursing trainees were largely female.

Although these exchange programmes were framed in terms of international solidarity and medical system development, the trainee nurses and doctors also filled a gap in East Germany, where many physicians had fled to the West (Hong 2015, p. 203). Most of the students or trainees had also come because of a wish to experience new cultures and get to know the world. As in the colonial period, most of the African students and trainees that came in the period form the 1950s to the 1980s, belonged to families from the higher social and economic echelons of their countries of origin; their main motivation was not to earn money to send to their families as remittances but to get a prestigious education and gain some social and cultural capital by getting to know the world. But there are many personal accounts of how they experienced racism in many aspects of life, from their jobs to the private sphere (Pugach 2015)

It is difficult to estimate how many children of African descent have been born in Germany since 1945. What we do have is rough numbers of people of African descent living in Germany today: In 2018, there were 570,115 African nationals living in Germany, about 60 per cent of whom were men, and 40 per cent women (Bundesamt 2019). However, this number does not include people of African descent who possess only German nationality. In its 2017 micro-census, which includes the category 'person with migration background' (*Personen mit Migrationshintergrund*), (which includes the children of migrants who may only have German citizenship) the German Federal Statistics Office recorded 856,000 people with an African 'migration background' living in Germany today; but as the German census does not contain questions about ethnicity, these numbers are only approximate (Bundesamt 2017). Moreover, these figures do not include children born after 1945 to African American soldiers and German women, who would also belong to the same racialised group.

American influences in Germany after World War II

In order to understand later developments within Black and Afro-German movements in Germany from the 1980s in terms of membership and political engagement, it is also important to explain the transnational history that Germany has with the USA – more precisely the US military. For many of my interlocutors, especially those from Frankfurt, the Black American presence in Germany was an important point for the development of their personal Afrodiasporic identities. After

World War II, American influences were very important in shaping political and entertainment cultures in Germany. US cultural and political production, from jazz to the Civil Rights movement, became an important source of inspiration for Germans who wanted to reinvent themselves and break with the historical burden of World War II.

US military occupation after World War II

At the end of October 1945, the US occupation zone comprised Bavaria, Hesse, areas within Baden-Württemberg and parts of the city state of Bremen (because of the importance of the port). After World War II, there were almost three million American troops in Europe, most of them in Germany. The US occupation had a greater impact on Germany than the presence of French or British forces, as the presence of the US military continues until today. By 1947, most American troops had left Germany, but around 137,000 remained. Yet in the 1950s, increasing numbers of American GIs began to arrive in West Germany again, because of US containment policy with regard to the Soviet Union, and new neighbourhoods emerged bringing American life to German cities. At the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, there were again more than 250,000 GIs stationed in West Germany. Although the occupation ended with the coming into effect of the new constitution and the creation of the FRG in 1949, the American presence in West Germany very much remained, due to its being a member of NATO, a military organisation that was founded to resist the Soviet presence in Europe, and the beginning of the Cold War (1947–89).

In geopolitical terms, Germany was of major strategic importance. In 1955 West Germany or the FRG was granted full sovereignty. From 1949 until then, the FRG was a self-governing dominion under Allied supervision (Poiger 2000). It was only after the Cold War and the unification of Germany in 1991 that the number of US soldiers has been steadily reduced from about 200,000 then, to 33,000 today. In particular, the rise in the number of soldiers arriving in the 1950s led to big changes in German cities, as they required not just living space but also entertainment. Rather quickly, and despite the anti-fraternisation rules of the US army, relationships developed between US soldiers and German women. Many American-German couples found their way together and a new generation of so-called occupation babies (the first being the Rhineland children after World War I) were born, many of whom were of African American origin. The historian Sabine Lee (2011, p. 170) estimates that around 4,000 children were born with African American GI fathers and German mothers before 1955 (of 37,000 US 'occupation children' in total). Although the reputation of American soldiers in Germany was better than that of their Soviet colleagues, women who were or had been in relationships with soldiers were heavily stigmatised in Germany in the 1950s. And even more so if the soldier was African American.

The autobiography of the Afro-German writer and activist Ika Hügel-Marshall (1998) tells one such story of a family that was torn apart due to the stigma and discrimination that 'American-Lovers' (*Ami-Liebchen*, a vulgar term for German women in relationships with American soldiers) and their children faced (more about that in the biography of Hügel-Marshall in Chapter 9). From the end of the war until the 1960s, children with a dark skin tone were often referred to as 'occupation children' in public discourse, much like the 'Rhineland children' of the post-World War I occupation, even if they had an African migration history. At the same time though, as anthropologist Damani Partridge (2012) notes, relationships between German women and Black American men also became more popular, especially for younger people who wanted to demarcate themselves from the Nazi past and conservative Germany in general. The German-Liberian writer Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi, for example, notes in his autobiography that right after the war he felt that his skin colour had actually become an asset, '[B]lack was definitely in' (1999, p. 288) he writes. He also recounts his experiences in the then still segregated GI clubs, where Black GIs would hang out with their German dates in the Black clubs.

American culture played an important role in constructing German identities in both East and West Germany in the Cold War years following World War II (Poiger 2000). Large-scale exchange programmes were set up, with over 11,000 Germans (politicians and others) going to the USA, while the USA also founded cultural exchange centres – the 'America houses' (*Amerikahäuser*) – in Germany. The first of the American cultural centres, which opened in many major German cities, was founded in Frankfurt as early as 1946. They functioned as a platform for spreading American culture in Germany with libraries and other cultural events (for more on Frankfurt, in particular, see Chapter 3 'Growing up in Frankfurt'). American popular culture, such as movies, jazz and other genres of music, also found its way to the German public via other channels, especially Radio Luxembourg and the American and British Forces Networks (AFN, BFN).

Cultural consumption and the politics around regulation of access to American cultural production became central to political reconstruction in the FRG and the GDR and was were by both states to confront the tasks of building a nation and national identity after Nazism and in the midst of the Cold War. In the beginning, state attitudes toward American popular culture were generally negative in East and West alike. But that changed considerably during the Cold War, when West Germany was an ally of the USA. What reverberates from the analysis by historian Uta Poiger is that, although Germany tried to address its history of racism and particularly the genocide of the European Jews, this did not necessarily mean that racism against other people, such as those of African descent, was called into question. A lot of the racist stereotypes attached to jazz in the Weimar Republic and in the Nazi doctrine of 'degenerate art' (*entartete Kunst*) reverberated for some time after World War II. Celebrated by the open-minded cosmopolitans in the 1920s, jazz was defamed as

'Negro music' by conservatives. Both positive and negative attitudes towards African American jazz musicians and dancers were charged with racialised stereotypes. The general attitude saw it as exotic, naive or primitive, and in its authenticity closer to nature than white Europeans:

> Many Germans failed to see that associating African Americans with the jungle or even seeing them as authentic representations of Africa was problematic. Charges of blacks' alleged primitivism reaffirmed racial hierarchies, both in the avant-garde, especially among the expressionists who viewed primitivism as liberating, and in the right wing, where celebrations of primitivism fueled a much more pernicious racism that saw primitivism as a cause for racial decline. (Poiger 2000, p. 17)

Germans who had been jazz fans during or before World War II, when they faced persecution, founded 'hot clubs' for listening and playing jazz. These clubs also became a meeting place and forum of exchange between Germans and Americans, especially African American jazz musicians and fans. Hot clubs were founded in Leipzig, Berlin and Frankfurt, among other cities. Thus, this music became a 'symbol of a more general liberation from Nazi oppression' (Poiger 2000, p. 42).

The Civil Rights movement in Germany

Transatlantic influences also mattered a good deal for all kinds of left protest movements in Germany after 1945. Student protests in the 1960s and 70s drew on the Civil Rights and Black Power movements as well as on experiences of decolonial struggles in African and Asian countries (Poiger 2000, Slobodian 2008).

Due to the specific role of the USA as an occupying power and the strategic role of Germany for the USA during the Cold War, transnational exchange between West Germany and the USA was remarkably strong, not only on the institutional level but also culturally and politically. The Civil Rights movement in general, and the Black Power movement in particular, had a huge impact on student protests in Germany and Europe. Martin Klimke has researched the 1968 global protest movement as the first transnational youth subculture that was made possible by rapid changes in telecommunications and transport: the emergence of a global media and information landscape as well as the rise in air traffic: 'With universities as breeding grounds of protest [...] the late 1960s saw the emergence of an international language of dissent' (Klimke 2011, p. 6). He analyses the relationship between the group Students for a Democratic Society in the US and the German socialist students union *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (both abbreviated as SDS), showing their mutual influence.

These interactions and alliances between American and West German student groups in the 1960s and 1970s are one example of how transnational activism was

spread, especially through the circulation of people and ideas between the USA and Germany; and it worked in both directions. Ideas generated initially within the Black Power movement, for example, travelled to Germany, where they met a youth keen to rebel against a Nazi past that was still present (with former Nazis still holding political positions). Angela Davis, one of the most prominent figures of the Black Power movement, studied under Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno in Frankfurt from 1965 to 1967; before going back and becoming active in the Black Panther movement, she already was active in the Frankfurt section of the SDS (Klimke 2011); after she was imprisoned in the USA, Angela Davis Solidarity Committees emerged in West Germany.

> The influence of the African American Black Power struggle on the West German protest movement not only consisted in the creation of a transnational protest identity, but also substantially shaped the formation and dynamics of the students activists' ideological position. (Klimke 2011, p. 108)

Many West German students visited the USA and became familiar with the race-based struggles there – the ghettoisation, poverty and racism. And they brought thoughts about that back with them to Germany. There were also many American exchange students in Germany, who introduced news and ideas from the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, such as Rudy Dutschke's American wife Gretchen Klotz, who was herself a student activist. Student leaders from Germany gave lecture tours in the USA, wrote about German student protests in Black Panther media, and Black Panther members came to Germany to hold lectures as well, or to participate in protests.

Black Panther Solidarity Committees were founded, and marches of mourning were organised after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Black Power ideas also influenced African American GIs who were stationed in Germany and who became members of the Black Panthers. There were several protests where GIs marched together with student protesters and other anti-imperialist and decolonial movements (for example the Algerian National Liberation Front) or planned actions together in the 1960s and 1970s (Höhn 2008).

This circulation of people and ideas is what cultural theorist Paul Gilroy (1993) describes as a positive form of African diaspora-making, based on the movement of ideas but especially of people. Gilroy describes how W.E.B. du Bois's travels in Germany in 1892–94 and the political debates he experienced there, especially around the question of nation-building, inspired him and other early pan-Africanist thinkers to develop theories of Black nationalism. By analysing some personal trajectories, including that of the writer Richard Wright, who lived for a long time in France, Gilroy shows how the African diaspora and pan-Africanism were transnationalised by people originating from different places fighting diverse

struggles: against race segregation in the USA, decolonisation in most African and Asian countries, racism and the trauma of the Holocaust in Europe. Wright (1908–1960) spent many years in Paris (he went there to flee the McCarthy era in 1947 as a member of the US Communist Party) where many Black American writers would later follow, including James Baldwin. Among other activities, Wright was an editor of the journal *Présence Africaine*, one example of active cultural production by the African diaspora, a journal that aimed at including writings by Black people in Europe, the Americas and Africa. This important journal, which is now also a publishing house, was founded in 1947 by the Senegalese national Alioune Diop. The idea of the journal came into being after the 1945 Pan-Africanist Congress in Manchester (the first was held in 1900 in London, the second in 1919 in Paris). In the USA, Wright was drawn to Marxism (he became a member of the Communist Party in 1933) and when he moved to France, he discovered French existentialist writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre. For Wright, leaving the USA and traveling widely enabled him to draw connections among the struggles against fascism, imperialism and colonialism.

Afrodiasporic organisations and representation in Germany up to the turn of the millennium

The Afro-German movements of the 1980s onwards were more inspired by African American organisations, ideas and people than African or pan-African ones. The two most important in this regard are the Initiative for Black people in Germany (ISD[3]) and Afro-German Women (ADEFRA[4]) both of which were founded in 1986 and are still active today (these two organisations and their connection with Black American cultural production will be explored in detail in Chapter 9).

These organisations were founded a few years before German unification and one of the tasks of Afro-German activists was soon to be to write about the implications of unification for Black people and People of Colour. The racist upheavals of the 1990s and the rise of neo-Nazi subcultures amplified their anti-racist vocation. Until then their work had consisted more in creating networks for Black people, and Black women in particular, and raising public awareness about the long history of Afrodescendant people in Germany. Yet the racist brutality emerging in the 1990s made members of ISD and ADEFRA more active the overall anti-racist struggle. Attacks on refugees, non-European guest workers/contract workers and People of Colour grew in the 1990s. There was the incident in Hoyerswerda (1991), where neo-Nazis and sympathisers among the local population chased away people living in a home for asylum seekers and former contract workers, throwing stones and bottles at them. And at Rostock-Lichtenhage, where again neo-Nazis and a mob of around

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3   The ISD website is at http://isdonline.de/ (accessed 24 November 2020).
4   ADEFRA has its website at http://www.adefra.com/ (accessed 24 November 2020).

3,000 local people set fire to buildings housing former contract workers and asylum seekers (1992); at Mölln, where extreme right-wing activists killed two women and a child (1992); and Solingen (1993), where five Turkish women and girls were murdered in an arson attack (BPB 2018).

In the 1990s, the German government began to use an ethnocultural vocabulary to encourage a sense of national unity among the two German states that had been divided ideologically for forty years through the Cold War. Jürgen Habermas (1997) has also noted the shift in the language used by East German demonstrators right before the fall of the wall (see below). Damani Partridge (2012) analyses how unification and the fall of the wall affected racist attitudes towards people living in Germany, who were considered 'non-German' by the mainstream media and politicians, whether it was guest workers, refugees or Germans of Arabic, African or Asian descent. He explains how a shift in the discourse on nationality in a united and post-socialist Germany since the 1990s may have influenced the emergence of widespread racist violence. In the demonstrations for the rights of free movement and travel for people in East Germany in 1988, the slogans changed rapidly from 'We are the people' (*Wir sind das Volk*) to 'We are one people' (*Wir sind ein Volk*) – and the participation of openly extreme-right activists increased (Habermas 1997). Muriel Rambour also notes how the unification of the two German states in a single entity in 1990 incited a resurrection of ethnocultural understandings of the German nation and growing extreme-right movements using ethnonational myths and racist theories in their political programmes, especially (though not only) in the former socialist East German states.

The ISD focuses mostly on political work related to anti-racism in Germany. It remains the most prominent organisation in Germany that seeks to draw attention to anti-Black racist incidents. It is also inclusive, representing the rights of all Black people in Germany. Nonetheless, today Africans and people of African descent in Germany are represented by a variety of organisations. Many of the most active, especially those with the strongest online presences, which usually have a younger membership, were founded around 2014, a year after the launch of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2013–2024),[5] which boosted funding and visibility for projects concerning people of African descent.

In 2012, the Central Council for the African Community (*Zentralrat der afrikanischen Gemeinde in Deutschland e.V*) was created.[6] It is a network of fifty-three African associations from different countries and with different agendas. Then there are other Afrodiasporic organisations in Germany with different agendas. One I was

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5   The official UN website of the decade is at: https://en.unesco.org/internationaldecadeforpe opleofafricandescent (accessed 22 June 2020).

6   The website of the Central Council is at: http://www.zentralrat-afrikagemeinde.de/ (accessed 30 April 2020).

in contact with is ADAN (the Afro German Graduate Network), which was founded in 2014 by a Frankfurt local of Sierra Leonean descent.[7] ADAN is less a political organisation than an economic and cultural network, similar to a student alumni network or a fraternity/sorority that holds networking events. The idea, as one of the founders, Allie B., told me, was to bring together highly educated people of African descent in Germany, whether born in Germany or recently migrated, to create a professional network. Allie B.'s motivation was that he was often one of the few people with a 'migration background' (he puts it in air quotes when he speaks) in his field – today he works for a major bank, having studied law. 'That can often feel a bit lonely', he added. Allie B. is in his thirties. Both of his parents migrated to Germany from Sierra Leone, and he and his siblings grew up close to Frankfurt. It was, as he said, the few encounters he had with Afrodescendant people who also had a similarly promising CV and a higher education – also Germans with an African heritage – that motivated and gave him the idea of founding ADAN. He explained further:

> I already knew one person; he was from Nigeria and was studying in Darmstadt, and then he had a friend who stayed with him for a while who had an internship at the Deutsche Bank. Back then I did an internship at Rohner und Partner (a law firm), so I always had to wear a suit. And I was always the only dark-skinned person around with a corporate look. And suddenly there were two more! Him and my friend. And that was a good feeling; it just made me happy to see 'Hey! There are others like me who work in big companies.' And this is how the idea emerged. We took the train together to Frankfurt every morning. That motivated me to say, 'Hey! Why don't we all get to know each other, it is important that we know each other so that we can carry this positive image to the outside in order to change the picture that many people have of Africans, and in order to be an example for the younger generations.' (Interview 5 December 2017)[8]

Although there has been African student immigration to Germany since the 1950s, with most individuals coming from upper and upper middle-class backgrounds, the majority of non-European migrants since the 1950s have been labour migrants employed in low-wage jobs. Racism in Germany intersects with classism, and for the descendants of guest workers, social mobility has not been easy so far – although it is increasing today with more access to higher education (see, for example, the study of social mobility of Germans of Turkish descent from Lemberger [2019]). This interplay between racialisation and class also entails challenges for people who are racialised but belong to a wealthier class of entrepreneurs or university graduates.

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7   ADAN's website is at: https://ada-netzwerk.com/ (accessed 8 August 2019).

8   This and all subsequent citations from German-language sources have ben translated by the author, including interviews with research interlocutors.

As Samina Mezgarzadeh (2019) highlights in the French context, these challenges include having one's bourgeois credentials called into question, encountering barriers when trying to enter the white-collar job market or the fear of facing deskilling.

One of the topics ADAN focuses on is 'Business in Africa': They offer advice and counselling to enterprises that want to invest in or trade with African countries. ADAN today brings together many people in various parts of Germany and is broadening the representation of Afrodiasporic people in Germany by creating networks more focused on the business world. One task is to establish contact with enterprises to create a pool of internship opportunities for younger students, a network, in particular, for those who might not have the economic and social capital per se from their families. To raise visibility and attract new members, they organised a roadshow and now have regional groups in Cologne, Stuttgart, Hamburg, Munich, Berlin and Frankfurt. Their focus is thus very much on mutual support in career questions for highly educated people. Yet, though this is a very different angle from the anti-racist work of ISD or the Black feminist agenda of ADEFRA, they do also consider their work to be political, and engage in anti-racist activities. What is more important to ADAN, however, is to show how Black people are not only victims of discrimination but can achieve success in Germany, and to highlight these successful careers as positive examples.[9] The members of ADAN are quite young, generally in their twenties and thirties. One of the things they have in common with organisations like the ISD is that they are all trying to work against negative stereotypes of people of African descent, and these organisations do sometimes work together on various projects around this subject. But the organisation mostly sees itself as a business and graduate network for people of African descent. On its Facebook page ADAN introduces itself as follows:

> In accordance with the name of our network 'Afro-deutsches-Akademiker Netzwerk', we would like to welcome graduates of African origin into our association. Members of the ADAN e.V. will receive the opportunity to interact with other students and alumni. […] They will not only obtain the chance to participate in a large student network, but also connect with decision makers from the corporate world. We are always looking for motivated and committed students who are eager to help our organisation achieve its goals.

Another Afrodiasporic organisation founded in 2014 is EOTO – Each One Teach One.[10]

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9   Mezgarzadeh (2019) also highlighted that aspect for Black managers and leaders associations in France.

10   EOTO has a website at: https://www.eoto-archiv.de/ (accessed 8 August 2019).

According to its website, EOTO is

> a community-oriented education and empowerment project in Berlin. It opened
> its doors in 2014 as a neighbourhood library and meeting place […] EOTO e.V. is
> working together with other organisations for the interests of Black, African and
> Afrodiasporic people in Germany and Europe.

EOTO has a library with over 5,000 books by African and African diaspora authors. In addition, it organises many events and is very active online, which it does to reach the younger generation. Its library is in the historically important Berlin district of Wedding, which has been an important cultural centre for Africans since the late nineteenth century. EOTO follows in the tradition of pan-African organisations and organises events such as 'Afrolution 2019 – Panafricanism revis(it)ed', inviting African and Afro-European authors and activists alike to public lectures and networking events.

As well as these very new Afrodiasporic organisations, there are also long-running pan-African cultural organisations such As the Cameroonian AfricAvenir,[11] which was founded by the father of a friend of Layla Zami (one of my interlocutors), Prince Kum'a Ndumbe III. AfricAvenir, which was founded in Douala in 1985, is an NGO that works in the field of political education and knowledge production from a Pan-African perspective. The Prince went into exile in Berlin in 2000 and the organisation has had an office there ever since. Layla is good friends with his daughter and has worked for the organisation in Cameroon. They got to know each other when Layla lived with her family in Berlin as a child from the age of nine until she was 14. Today AfricAvenir has offices in Namibia, Benin, Austria, Senegal and France.

All of these organisations, ISD, EOTO, ADAN and AfricAvenir, are in contact with each other and sometimes convene events together.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the history and current landscape of African diaspora in Germany. It described how the first African diaspora organisations emerged during German colonialism in the period prior to World War I. It then considered the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era, during which most efforts at organisation were annihilated and many Africans left Germany. Those people of African descent who stayed faced considerable discrimination. Among the Nazi laws was a marriage ban and a strong possibility of people being sacked from their jobs if they were not considered 'Aryan'. Some were deported to concentration camps.

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11   AfricAvenir is online at: http://www.africavenir.org/ (accessed 13 August 2019).

The next period, from 1945 to 1980, brought significant numbers of African students and workers from many different countries to both East and West Germany, whose ideological competition also played out in the arena of migration policy. In this era, the US military and the infrastructures of occupation also had an influence on German cultural and political organisations. Since the 1980s, new Afrodiasporic organisations have emerged, and there is quite a diversity of movements today.

In all these historical periods, the various organisations had a common goal: to fight racism, colonialism and racist discrimination in Germany and to build communities of solidarity. What most organisations also had in common was that they were founded by people who came from the upper classes or had access to higher levels of education. The next chapter will turn from the macro to the micro level and focus on the everyday experiences of two women of African descent born in the 1980s in Frankfurt, Germany.

3. Growing up in Frankfurt

Aminata C., Maya B, Lafia T. and I share an important feature in our lives: We all grew up in Frankfurt, and we are happy about that. Although Maya and I left the city – a long time ago in my case, while Maya moved away for several years before going back – we are all fond of the city and of our memories of childhood and our teenage years. One of the reasons we like Frankfurt is that it is a very multicultural city, and we grew up with children who came from very different national and cultural backgrounds. We lived in similar environments, which could be described as urban and middle class, not posh areas but neighbourhoods that were close to each other and near the city centre.

Maya and Aminata both grew up with their West African fathers; their daily existence included Sierra Leonian or Guinean cultural practices right through their childhoods and adolescence in Germany. For Lafia, the situation was different. She grew up with her German mother and only saw her father from time to time, as he lived in a city nearby. Senegalese cultural practices were not part of her self-understanding as a child and teenager.

In this chapter, I will focus on the process of growing up in Frankfurt by zooming in on the lives of Aminata and Maya, with whom I have been good friends since high school. This picture will be complemented by the life story of Lafia, who also grew up around the same time in Frankfurt but moved in slightly different circles.

The chapter demonstrates the role of place in the construction and understanding of selfhood. The other aspect that I focus on here is generation. Aminata, Maya and Lafia are shaped by the city they grew up in, but the specific time they grew up in the bonds that created among people of the same generation also mattered a great deal. Aminata and Maya's lives were influenced by what Frankfurt had to offer in the 1990s and around the turn of the millennium, a time when US infrastructure and GI culture were still present – though not to the same extent as immediately after World War II – and these played a significant part in their young lives. This was not the case for Lafia, who neither moved in the American world nor in African diasporic networks as a child and teenager. Dealing with her Senegalese heritage started much later than for Aminata or Maya and was more connected to her education choices. Yet besides these differences, their paths also crossed as teenagers,

as all three frequented the same middle-class school circles and there were places where they hung out together. The stories of the three women, although singular and subjective, also transmit something that I call 'a feeling of a generation' because the experiences they had and the places they frequented resonate with many others of their age group, people born in the 1980s in the cosmopolitan city of Frankfurt.

The shared reference to a certain place at a certain time creates a feeling of familiarity. When I speak to old friends from Frankfurt or even people who grew up in the city at the same time as me but who I only met after leaving Frankfurt age 19 to move to Vienna, the fact of having grown up in Frankfurt around the same time creates an instant bond. We refer to the same places, hanging out in the city centre after school (at Burger King or the Zeilgalerie shopping centre) or at the Grüneburgpark (a big park close to the city centre). Although we might not have spent time there together, knowing that we were part of it makes it feel as if we did. In many of these spaces, class distinction did not matter much – as people of all class backgrounds would come together in the city centre, and we met young people who attended all the different types of school. Yet in many other spaces class distinctions were already very present, in practice if not at the level of vocalisation.

The Grüneburgpark, for example, was close to a high school (Bettina Gymnasium) in a well-off neighbourhood, and the pupils usually came from middle-class backgrounds. The school system in Germany tends to facilitate class distinctions from an early age. After primary school (four years, usually from six to ten) pupils (or their parents) have to decide what sort of school they want to attend, and their primary school teacher also gives a recommendation. The German secondary school system back then was divided into three categories in Hesse, where Frankfurt is located: One ended after 9th grade (*Hauptschule*), the second after 10th grade (*Realschule*) and the third after 12th or 13th grade (*Gymnasium*). Today the *Gymnasium* and the *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive school) provide a direct path into higher education. The majority of pupils who attend a *Gymnasium* already come from middle-class families, and their parents often have a tertiary education themselves; they are recommended for this type of school far more often than pupils from working-class families. The German educational system reproduces social inequalities from very early on in the lives of children (Kuhlmann 2008, Solga 2008, Wolter 2011). In this way, common generational feeling is divided along class lines.

Then there is the shared reference point of certain major global events that we all experienced while together in Frankfurt. We were teenagers when the attacks on the World Trade Center took place and the 'War on Terror' began. Our first political demonstrations were in opposition to the war in Iraq launched by the Bush administration in 2003. We also witnessed the rise of the internet. In terms of the specific group I and my participants belonged to, party culture provides a number of common references. Here the American GI clubs come into play, as everyone who was into RnB and Hip Hop frequented the same clubs in and around Frankfurt. Usually

when we speak about these places with friends, there is a certain amount of nostalgia that goes with it, a sentiment of carefree youth that we spent together.

The young women that I work with, Aminata, Maya and Lafia, now bear the heavy responsibilities of adulthood, and all that comes with it. They all have children of their own, are trying to create a good work–life balance, want to advance in their careers and be there for their children, and sometimes face illness and loss in their own families with the attendant care responsibilities. The feeling that life has become more serious is all-encompassing. And so it was that our discussions often turned towards nostalgia for the 'good old days'. Talking about the times when we were young and carefree, remembering certain songs, certain items and brands and mocking our youthful styles helps make today feel less serious as we remember older versions of ourselves.

Later I will describe Aminata and Maya's teenage years, their involvement in African diaspora family networks and their encounters with African American culture in Frankfurt, which were formative of Black identity. I examine how spaces such as the GI night clubs, the PX (mall reserved for American citizens) and the US airbase were important for how they dealt with their African heritage and being Black women in Germany. As I have known them for a long time, a lot of the things that I write are memories that we discussed together. At other times we also carried out scheduled interviews. Besides many discussions of my research, we also took a trip to London together, which I also discuss. The material I use for the analysis and representation of Aminata's and Maya's lives is taken from notes that were part of my PhD fieldwork in Frankfurt in 2017/18 and, in Aminata's case, also from three telephone interviews between Lausanne and Frankfurt at the end of 2018 (two biographical ones and one about travelling to Ghana) and many other conversations that we had over the years. With Lafia, the methods were a bit different. As we were not friends before the research we started with formal interviews and began to spend time together socially after the first official meeting. We had three interview sessions, in two of which she told me about her life and travels. At our first session I informed her that she could just start telling me about her life, but she was a bit confused by that, 'You mean, relating to being Afro-German or...?' I explained that if she immediately thought about that she could start with it, but that in general she could just start with her experiences of growing up.

Situating Frankfurt

Regina Römhild, doing research on transnationalism in Germany, called Frankfurt a 'small global city' (2004). Frankfurt is in the state of Hesse, located in the west of Germany. It is known as an important global financial centre and is the seat of the European Central Bank. It also has Germany's biggest international airport. Its population is now over 750,000, making it the fifth most populous city in Germany (Bunde-

samt 2019). Almost 30 per cent of Frankfurt residents do not possess German citizenship, and according to a survey by the city's Office for Multicultural Affairs (Amka) (the only such office in Germany), more than half of the population has a 'migration background'. However, most of these are second generation, which means they were born in Germany to at least one parent who had immigrated from another country (Amka 2017). This also means they may or may not have German citizenship, as in German law citizenship is still often acquired through the principle of *Jus sanguinis*, which means that for a person to get German citizenship they need to have German ancestry. Since 2000, *Jus solis* is also recognised (with some constraints) alongside *Jus sanguinis* (Mecheril 2003). In terms of the African diaspora, of the 220,000 inhabitants of foreign nationality, a little over 17,000 hold citizenship of an African country. That is about eight per cent of the foreign population. The majority of people with African citizenship are from North Africa (Morocco, Tunisia); this is followed by West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Togo), East Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia), Central Africa (Cameroon, Sudan) and finally Southern African countries. Hesse is the state with the second-largest population of African nationals after North-Rhine-Westphalia, a neighbouring state to the West. The largest groups of foreign nationals in Hesse are Turkish, Croatian and Italian (Bundesamt 2017a, Bundesamt 2019).

Aminata and her father both told me that Frankfurt felt like a safe place for them. A place where they would not feel as if they stood out in any particular way, because the city was so diverse and international. During our interview, Aminata's father, Lamine Camara, would speak of his perceptions of Frankfurt:

> I think Frankfurt always was *weltoffen* ['open to the world']. I almost never felt like a stranger in Frankfurt. Almost. I cannot say much about the rest of Germany, but Frankfurt always was '*multikulti*' (multicultural), other people always lived here. You always had the neighbour that was Portuguese, or from Ghana or Nigeria. Frankfurt was always like that.

When talking about various journeys she made around Europe, Aminata also stressed that she was always happy to come back to Frankfurt, where she had created a safe 'microcosm' for herself and her family. Many neighbourhoods in Frankfurt are socially and culturally mixed and richer areas are often very close to poorer neighbourhoods. Aminata grew up and still lives in a socially mixed neighbourhood with a majority of working and middle-class people, a lot of green spaces with a small river flowing through it. It is centrally located with many bus, train and underground stops close by. Using the train, you can reach the city centre in ten minutes. The swimming pool is very close by, which in summer becomes a home from home for many who live in nearby neighbourhoods – Aminata and her family among them.

Maya, Lafia and I also grew up a socially and culturally mixed neighbourhood, but it has been gentrifying for a few years now, partly because it is a central district very close to the main station and city centre and the richer 'Westend' neighbourhood. It takes 15 minutes to cycle to the city centre and ten to reach the Grüneburgpark, two spaces where we hung out a lot as children and teenagers.

The US military presence in Frankfurt since 1945

The US Army presence in and around Frankfurt dates from the end of World War II in 1945, when Hesse became part of the US occupation zone, whose capital was at Wiesbaden. But the headquarters of the whole US military in Germany was in Frankfurt, and all soldiers were coordinated from there. As their headquarters they chose the IG Farben Buiding,[1] the head office of the largest chemical conglomerate in Germany (Häfner 2014). More than 3,000 people worked at the headquarters. The US Army moved out of the building in 1994, but a number of army bases remained around Frankfurt after that.

Some 11,000 army personnel, together with their families, used to live close to the headquarters, which is located in the city centre (partly in Westend, partly in the Ginnheim district) in a part of the city people in Frankfurt still refer to as the '*AmiSiedlung*', the American Settlement (Tyler 2014). The IG Farben Building was acquired from the American military by the German federal government and sold to Goethe University Frankfurt in 1996, in which capacity it has served as a beautiful campus in Frankfurt centre for several years now (Häfner 2014).

The rise in the number of soldiers arriving in the 1950s led to big changes in Frankfurt. Entertainment to keep the American soldiers happy was an important part of the infrastructural development after 1945 and thus, in the course of a few years, more than twenty-five GI clubs were founded in and around the city, spaces where Germans and American soldiers would meet – and still do today. After being significant in promoting African American culture in the form of jazz music in the 1950s, the GI clubs turned to RnB, Hip Hop and soul in the 1990s. Fans of such music still attend the GI clubs in Frankfurt, Darmstadt and Wiesbaden now. The influence that black music had on lives of young people in Europe is also well exemplified in a side note by Paul Gilroy, writing about himself as a Black teenager in London, a generation before ours:

> When I was a child and a young man growing up in London, black music provided me with a means to gain proximity to the sources of feeling from which our local conceptions of blackness were assembled. The Caribbean, Africa, Latin America and above all black America contributed to our lived sense of a racial self. [...]

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1   For an overview of the history of the building, see: https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/68266113/The_IG_Farben_BuildingConstruction_and_Architectural_History (accessed June 2019).

> They were important also as a source for the discourses of blackness with which
> we located our own struggles and experiences. (Gilroy 1993, p. 109)

Gilroy here points to the importance of a 'local conception of blackness', which is then influenced by transnational flows. Black American culture in Frankfurt did not seem to matter much to Aminata's father, though. When asked about any connections with African Americans in Germany, he answers that differences in class and education meant that he did not have much in common with them. 'We were students, and they were soldiers', he said. And although Aminata told me that they went to the PX when she was a child, where a friend of her father's worked, this did not seem to be something he would describe as an influence on him in Frankfurt. The fact that he was already an adult when he came to Germany, having been socialised in Guinea meant he was not interested in drawing on GI culture to construct himself as Afrodescendant (more about Lamine Camara's trajectory in Chapter 4).

Another factor is that the GI culture was male dominated and thus more attractive for women, who were interested in dating and dancing. For my generation of Frankfurters, born in the 1980s, the US presence still played a very important part while growing up, for some more than for others, depending on one's taste in music and culture. For Aminata and Maya (as I will discuss further), the GI club scene was significant for their development and understanding of an individual sense of being a Black teenager.

Aminata Camara and Maya B. – Inspired by Black America

Fieldwork at home

> We sit in a café in Frankfurt's old town and for the first time in more than
> 20 years of friendship with Aminata, I switch on the recording device and ask her
> to tell me about her life. Although I've known her for many years, many of the
> things she tells me about her childhood and her parents are new to me, which
> somehow catches me by surprise. (Fieldnote, 14 January 2018)

The first interview with Aminata is very short, only twenty minutes, because an old friend comes in to the café by coincidence and joins us. Frankfurt is a small city after all. But we continue the life-story interview later on.

I first met Aminata when we were ten and had just started high school. Aminata is in her early fourties today, has two children aged eleven and 7 with her husband Albert, whose parents are from Ghana; he was born in Frankfurt. Her father migrated from Guinea to Germany in the 1970s on a student scholarship from a German foundation and studied economics in Frankfurt, where he has lived ever since. Aminata's

mother is from Frankfurt. She studied German literature in the 1970s and was active in left-wing politics in Frankfurt, which was a hub of the 1968 movements. Today, Aminata's mother works for an overseas development agency. Aminata's parents separated when she was in her late teens, but all three still live in Frankfurt. Aminata has a really close relationship with her mother, who often takes care of the grandchildren, as does Albert's father, and both live close to Aminata and her family. Aminata studied French, Culture and Economics and works in public relations. She also does a lot of work as a moderator of events on migration, the empowerment of women and People of Colour. She has recently taken on a new role at an educational organisation which does work related to anti-racism. Aminata has also co-organised the Afrika-Fest in Frankfurt for several years. It is fair to say that her family leads a middle-class, urban life. Although her early experience was very transnational – she was born in Colombia, where her parents lived for two years, and they lived in Conakry, in Guinea, as a child – Frankfurt is very much Aminata's home base. When she talks about Frankfurt, she says that she cannot remember ever having felt estranged from the city; even when she lived in Conakry with her parents, they came back in the summer, and she saw her friends again. And besides studying in Mannheim for a while (one hour from Frankfurt by train) she has lived most of her life in Frankfurt, which is also where she started her own family.

Maya grew up in Frankfurt with her father, who came to Germany from Sierra Leone, her mother, who is from a small town close to Frankfurt, and her little brother. Today Maya's father lives in Sierra Leone again, something he always dreamed of. Like Aminata's father, he came to Germany in the 1970s, and he lived there for about thirty years, founding a family. Through his daughter, he is still very much connected to Frankfurt. At first, he went to the United Kingdom, but as the economic situation was better in Germany at the time, he decided on the advice of friends to relocate to Frankfurt. Maya's parents separated when the children were still young, and Maya and her brother grew up with their father. After a few years, Maya's father married a second time, and the family of three expanded. Maya lived as part of that big family until her father decided to relocate to the USA. He had good job opportunities there, as did his second wife, who was a trained nurse but could not work in Germany because her diploma was not recognised. Maya was about 17 then, and decided not to join the family in moving to the States. That was a tough decision for Maya, and she missed her father, her brother and the rest of the family. Maya studied tourism and urban planning in Cologne and Kenya, and today lives with her young son in Frankfurt. Previously she had moved to Nigeria with her husband Otis for work, where she was employed by a major development cooperation organisation.

Although I only became friends with Maya during high school, when we ended up in the same class, we went to the same primary school and grew up in the same neighbourhood. I remember seeing her playing in the school playground or in the

class pictures that hung in the hallway of the primary school. But we only became friends when we were about 14, when Aminata, Maya and I started to spend a lot of time together. In high school, Maya was always the one with the best written essays; she was very creative. I understood why when we began to become friends. Maya was a bookworm, and together with her then best friend, Clara, she hung out at the neighbourhood library a lot. It was Maya who sparked my interest in the African diaspora. When I needed book advice, I would ask Maya. We were both really into family sagas. After advising me to read Isabelle Allende's *House of Spirits*, she recommended that I read Alex Haley's *Roots* and *Queen*, novels about the genealogy of a family caught up in slavery.

These novels tell the story of Kunta Kinte, who was born in West Africa in the eighteenth century, captured and sold into slavery and shipped to the USA. They follow his life and the lives of his descendants. I was mesmerised. As I slowly began to be interested in stories of the African diaspora or Black America, Maya was already a huge fan and had read Malcolm X and many others.

It was ongoing conversations and experiences with Aminata and Maya which sparked in a big way my interest of wanting to work on the topic of life stories of young adult Germans of African descent, their life in Germany and the role of transnational travel in it. I remember travelling together to Paris and Munich with school, and discovering the American GI club scene in Frankfurt and surroundings together as teenagers and young women. Maya and Aminata have been good friends for about as long and the fact that they are both of mixed German and West African descent together with their love for Hip Hop, Soul and RnB brought them very close in their teenage years. Even if they were not friends from the beginning it had been important for Maya to not be the only Afrodescendant person in class (they were not the only Pupils of Colour in class but the only ones of African descent). Since I moved away from Frankfurt at 19 our contact persisted but I was much less involved in their day-to-day life and they less in mine. Starting my fieldwork brought me closer to both once again.

Aminata – Between Frankfurt and Conakry as a child

Aminata was born in Bogotá, Colombia, in the mid-1980s, when her mother was there teaching German, accompanied by her father. They left Bogotá soon after she was born and went back to Frankfurt, where her parents both found jobs at a development cooperation agency. After a year, her father started to think about relocating to Conakry. There had been a change of government in Guinea, and he began to see an opportunity to live there with his family. They did move there in the 1990s but came back after four years, again due to a shift in politics, which made it difficult for the family to stay. In Guinea, Aminata went to a French school and experienced, as she explains it, an upper-class expat life:

We lived in Conakry, the capital. I suppose that is the only place where there is a French school. But yes, we were there and lived in a rented house. Years went by until I was about nine, and well we had a good life there. We were, I would say, privileged expat kids, with a driver; I had a personal driver who drove me to school or to friends. Or a playdate was of course at the pool of a family / who were expats as well / Yes, French families, American families, everything mixed […] And we were Whites, me as well. /But not your father./ No, of course not, but when we [she and her mother] were outside somewhere, my father worked a lot, then we were of course Whites. […] 'Fote' apparently means 'white' in Susu. But they also did that in Ghana [she and her family travelled there in 2018], they called us 'obroni', 'obroni' means white, that applied to us all as well [her husband and kids], although of course we are not white in our perception, for them we are. I remember that, I totally remember that.

When she thinks about her time in Guinea, what strikes her most is how privileged her life was, and today she reflects about it consciously in terms of class. When she talks about her life then, she is aware that she lived in an expat bubble and not as a true Guinean. Though her father was from Conakry, the structures they inhabited were those of the expat community and not the Guinean people. Moreover, since her father worked a lot, she spent more time with her mother, who is white and German, and Aminata was perceived as white as well. Aminata's foreignness dominated her experiences of Guinea. She went to the French school, all her friends were from the international community, and when I asked her if it had been difficult to leave Frankfurt at the time she said, 'We always returned to Germany for summer holidays, so almost for three months, which is why it never really felt like being away' (interview 14 January 2018). Nonetheless, she lived in Guinea for a few years and gained a sense of the place: the markets, the streets, the food, the smells – they are still part of her memories and are important for her identification as Guinean. Aminata and her parents returned to Germany when she was ten. The political situation had unfortunately become rather insecure, and they decided to move back. It was almost time for Aminata to enter high school. We went to school together until we were 16, when Aminata moved to a different one. But we stayed friends and spent a lot of time together in our teenage and young adult years.

Maya – Living in a large Sierra Leonian family as a child

Kitchen talk (1)

While we are sitting in my kitchen in Frankfurt, Maya's dad calls. I haven't seen him for about 20 years. Not since Maya and I were at school together. She hands the phone over to me: 'He wants to say hello.' A bit surprised, I take the phone:

'Hello Mister B., how are you?'

'Good, good, and how are you Silvia?' he answers.

S: 'I am okay, I am spending some time in Frankfurt now and also with Maya.'

Mister K.: 'That is great. I just wanted to properly say hello.'

S: 'Thank you, and how are things going in Sierra Leone?'

Mister B.: 'It is raining here now, but besides that things are fine.'

I hand the phone to Maya again, totally stunned at how well her father still speaks German, since he has lived in Germany now for more than 15 years. He spent many years in the USA, and upon retirement a few years back moved back to Sierra Leone after building a house there. Maya says, 'My father is really severe, so that when I speak something else than German with him he says "No! We have to speak German." Even when I'm speaking to my brother, my father insists that we speak German.' (Fieldnote, 10 October 2017)

Maya grew up in Frankfurt, but today her family is very transnational and lives between the USA, Sierra Leone and Germany. While growing up, Maya, who lived with her father until she was 17, was always part of a Sierra Leonean diaspora community; she knew both worlds, the world of her mother in Germany, when she stayed with her and the world of her father, who facilitated her contact to the small diaspora community in Frankfurt. She went to African parties as a child, and was often surrounded by Sierra Leonian people, food and music. When her father remarried, Maya and her brother acquired many new stepsiblings, and for about ten years they all lived together in a single household. Maya's youth was shaped by being socialised in both the Sierra Leonian diaspora and German society. Through family and friends, it was part of her everyday life. But unlike Aminata, she never lived for an extended period in her father's home country. As a child, she only visited Sierra Leone once with her father and brother, as the civil war broke out when she was seven, and was to last from 1991 to 2001. Yet Maya remembers that they always travelled a lot with her father, especially within Germany. She describes her father as very self-confident, recalling how, ever since she was little, he always told her that she should not put up with anyone treating her badly simply because her dad was African. Another influence was also important for Maya, even as a young child: Because her father worked at the PX mall and had many American colleagues, there was a constrant stream of Americans visiting their flat. This included many African Americans, and she was always impressed by their self-confidence. The USA became the country of her dreams as a young girl and she began to read African American authors. She also listened to a lot of Black American musicians, from Mary J Blige to Mos Def – Maya was a real fan of Soul, RnB and Hip Hop and knew every track, new or old.

As the USA was very present in the public sphere in Frankfurt not only through books, music and TV shows but also via the presence of US military structures and

soldiers stationed close by, her connection to the USA became even stronger when she was a teenager. This was also the time that Maya and Aminata became friends.

Aminata C. and Maya B. – Teenage years and GI club culture in Frankfurt

US cultural production, and African American material in particular, was already important for Maya when she was in her early teens, and it grew in significance in the coming years, this time more in relation to gender and sexuality. This was also when Aminata and Maya became friends. When when they were about fourteen, we all travelled together to Paris on a school exchange. And it was during their time in Paris that they discovered how much they had in common: in terms of family background – both their fathers are West African and they could find many similarities in their behaviours which often made them laugh – but even more so in their US-influenced tastes in music and fashion. After the Paris exchange, they began to hang out more together and I started to spend time with the two of them as well, I was also very much into Black music and dancing and we shared a similar sense of humour.

Aside from her Guinean kin relations, Aminata's 'first contact' with Afrodiasporic identity in Germany goes back to her teenage years in Frankfurt and is closely linked to the Black American GI club scene, which still existed in Frankfurt in the early 2000s, and the social world around it. She worked in a shop at the US airbase with her friend Shreeta, and consumed American products such as Hip Hop music magazines, food, cigarettes, make-up and more. Life as teenage girls in Frankfurt was pretty much defined by discovering the club scene in and around Frankfurt, especially centring on RnB and Hip Hop. I recall how the weeks were structured by the opening of clubs and special nights. It started occasionally on Tuesday at Cooky's, then continued on Friday and Saturday with Freeway or Natrix. Then there was the option of going to Park Café in Wiesbaden on Sunday and to Dorian Gray on Monday. This musical landscape has changed since then, as most of the clubs (except for Park café and Cooky's) have closed. Discovering the GI clubs where many African American soldiers and army employees went was a decisive moment out for Aminata, Maya and her friends (including myself) as a teenager and (very) young adult. These spaces were of particular importance in the process of constructing womanhood. For a few years, as Aminata recalls, her life revolved around Black American culture, music and GIs.

Every weekend we would dress up, put on our high heels, stand in the line at the Freeway club in the city centre or take the train to Darmstadt to go to Natrix. And we would always have a second pair of shoes – sneakers – in our bag, because we knew that we would dance the night away. Aminata and her friend Shreeta went more often than me or Maya, and their English skills improved massively, because as soon as we entered these club spaces, the language would switch to English. I remember that in the beginning that was difficult for me, but I got used to it. For Aminata, it

had become normal after a while, and for Maya it was not a problem at all, as she was used to speaking English with her father and he often brought African American friends home – English was an everyday language in her household. Freeway was a fairly small club, just one big dancefloor and a bar, but the doorwoman was a tough cookie, and we always feared we would not get in, although most often we did. Natrix was on another level: It was a huge club, with a massive dance floor and stage. It was easy to get lost in there, which is why we would usually always stay on a specific spot on the dancefloor. Natrix was a real club, there were beatbox and dance contests, foam parties, concerts. As we were still teenagers, we were able to afford the entry fee, but we did not drink there – that was too expensive.

We went to Black music, Hip Hop and RnB nights. There was always some African or Afrodiasporic sounds included in these events, like Dancehall or Ragga music, two Reggae-inspired musical styles from Jamaica; these were popular at the time in the clubs, including the classic 'Murder She Wrote' (1993) by Chaka Demus & Pliers, which we heard over and over again when we were adolescents (although it is from the 1990s, it was often played in the clubs as a classic). It was the time of German Reggae star Mr Gentleman, a white German who had connections to Jamaica and lived a transnational life between here and there. Today, the styles are called Afrotrap or Afrobeat; the most famous DJ that Aminata, Maya and I now listen to and go to see (not as often as when we were younger though) is called DJ Kwame (a popular Ghanaian name); the parties in Frankfurt clubs like Oye or Zoom club have names like Afrodiziac, Ghana meets Naija (short for Nigeria), Afro Swing or Hip Hop meets Afrobeats. A niche during our times, Hip Hop parties with Afrodiasporic sounds (especially Afrotrap) have become mainstream today.

Doing some research about Natrix, trying to find articles and photos, the most interesting parts actually were the comments under videos or articles; they come from former GIs who were stationed around the area as well as from Germans going out there. In a YouTube video from a 2003 performance by American rapper Petey Pablo in Natrix, I scrolled down to the comments. They include 'Best time of my life from 2000–2005 in Germany good memories', 'biggest club I ever seen forget ktown, Heidelberg or Stuttgart', 'Natrix was the hottest club ever' to 'since being there all other parties could not live up to it'.[2] For people in Germany who were interested in Hip Hop and RnB, the GI clubs were the gold standard in a musical landscape otherwise dominated by techno at the time.

During a phone call Aminata and I had when I was doing fieldwork with my other participants, Oxana and Layla, in November 2017, we talked about being influenced a lot by Black role models from the USA, not only in music but also in literature,

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2   Petey Pablo concert at the Natrix club in Darmstadt, 2003: https://www.youtube.com/watch ?v=DM2pLlMAqcE (accessed 21 April 2020).

or TV shows and channels such as MTV. Aminata stressed the importance of music and club culture for dealing with her African descent. 'We [referring to her and Maya] began to deal with this part of our identity very early on, through music and also through American culture in Frankfurt' she recalled. But the special thing, Aminata says, was also that it was very inclusive, it was not a space to distance oneself from others, there was also space for me or for Shreeta, for example. 'We constructed that for ourselves', Aminata emphasises, 'and this is what's special about it'. Many of the famous German Hip Hoppers from the 1990s such as Die Fantastischen Vier or Advanced Chemistry were influenced by the 'GI discos' and were drawn to Hip Hop, RnB and Soul through the influence of that club scene that existed into the 2000s (Jochmaring 2010).

Aminata found her sense of womanhood confirmed in the GI clubs. African American GIs represented access to a desirable and somehow exotic world, the world of American – and more particularly Black American – culture. During the second interview with Aminata, the role of GI culture in her life and ours was a major topic.

> Silvia: The time at high school was also the time of puberty, time to discover yourself [we laugh], and we discovered club culture, tell me how that was for you?
> Aminata: How did we start? Very very young, it was about being together and listening loud to music, then, more as a coincidence there was the Freeway that was the first club we went to, and there were sooo many Black people – and that was very cool, very cool to have such a vibe and to see so many faces, that for sure was something special. And of course the whole '*Ami*'-thing, USA, Hip Hop, I was very attracted to it. Actually almost everything was about that for a few years, everything else became irrelevant, school and everything moved to the background. It was about defining oneself there, and above all I got my womanhood affirmed there, and that was like 'Jackpot!'
> Silvia: But how were you perceived by the *Amis* (American GIs)?
> Aminata: Of course that was colourism, they saw in me that light-skinned [woman] [referring to an African American beauty ideal of not being 'too dark'] – although many also liked white women, but I looked like something they knew. I could have met them in America, I mean speaking of my looks. And I think I just corresponded to the common American beauty ideal in a way? But then of course, they thought 'Oh, she's really interesting because she speaks both German and such good English,' so I could use a lot of my skills, and was able to connect well… because most of the women were… But well at 17 it's okay, but if you're 25–30 you have to ask yourself what for, but for us at that young age it was all fun and games.

The GI world was a space to play with gendered identities that intersected with race and class. Jacqueline Nassy Brown, in her book on African diaspora in Liverpool, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (2005), stresses that the women of African descent she interviewed had gone out with African American soldiers especially because they felt that their own 'type' – being of African descent and having a brown skin tone – was often rejected by other men in their home town, and that the American GIs made them feel like attractive and desirable women. Black America and Black Americans gave Aminata an opportunity to create a positive racialised identity and a different way to deal with her mixed Guinean-German heritage, one that was detached from kinship, and something different from the usual othering and experience of not being like most other boys and girls in school. As Robert Smith (2006) notes in his study of Mexican-Americans in New York, dealing positively with a feature of oneself that is often discriminated against, stereotyped and othered in society is an important way to counter discrimination. Aminata's high level of education distinguished her from other women who hung out in the same spaces and marked a class distinction ('I could use a lot of my skills') and her body fulfilled beauty standards on Black American terms. These were not the experiences she had in the rest of her life in Germany, where she felt that the common beauty ideal represented in TV or media in general was skinny, very light-skinned and straight haired. Furthermore, flirting culture in Frankfurt was generally rather meagre compared to American norms.

Aminata saw that the desirable, highly sexualised women in Black music videos on MTV looked more like her; and the Black GIs looked more like men she desired; they looked like the men from the music videos with American sports clothes, fancy sneakers and durags (male hair coverings worn a lot in Hip Hop culture). As a teenager, these aspects of fun, love and desire were responsible for making the USA an imaginary dreamland for a while.

The experience of class distinction was more pronounced in the GI spaces than in others – many of the people Aminata was close to in the rest of her everyday life shared her middle-class and educational status. But in the GI places, many of the GIs and other people who hung out there came from another social clusterthat was more working class, with fewer educational opportunities.

During that time in her life, Aminata travelled to Miami twice. Once still as a teen with her mother and her friend Shreeta, and again as a young adult with Shreeta. That second visit to Miami, an imagined dreamland for her and her friend, also marked a key part in the process of her disenchantment with GI culture. However, the trip, self-financed by her and Shreeta's work at the US airbase, is still a great memory: 'We took all the money we made at the airbase and squandered it there. And it was the best, for me it was like I want to stay here, I never want to go away, I mean beach and holiday and the way it is then, of course you never want to come back again.' The trip marked the beginning of a majoir change in her life, the end of her

school years and the beginning of adulthood, with the taste of incredible freedom at turning 18, the age of legal adulthood in Germany. For Maya, too, it was especially through travel that the USA lost its status as a dreamland.

Disenchantment with GI culture

As they grew older, both Aminata and Maya went through a phase of disenchantment with African American and GI culture. Aminata's position came closer to the one of her father, who felt he had nothing in common with African American soldiers, and the differences in terms of class and political education began to be more pronounced. This was about the time of 9/11 and the beginning of the Iraq War (from 2003), which provoked major demonstrations in Frankfurt, in which many of us took part. In their childhood and early teens, Aminata and Maya both idolised American culture (as many of her generation did, including me). 'The ideal for Black culture was America, was *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*', Aminata mentioned in one interview.

> Silvia: Can you remember how the process of detaching yourself from that phase went?
> Aminata: Hmm, difficult. I'm not sure, but I think it was, especially after the *Abitur* [final school exam], it was kind of a clique thing. I had another clique and also other interests. I don't know, it just happened gradually, it was not really intended, and the clubs closed or got a new name, somehow the hype was over. Short and stormy.
> [...] Then, September 11, growing political interest which led me to rethink my position: 'Americans are not *that cool*, and I don't want to be like them.'
> Silvia: So it just changed a bit or what?
> Aminata: I don't know, I mean it was also this whole GI thing that was... the military, they were soldiers, the prolonged arm of Bush in a way! So that simply wasn't possible anymore. The whole debate was way too heated; when I think about it, it was the first political debate that really got to us.
> Silvia: Sure, I think it was also the first big gatherings that we really consciously went to, I remember.

Aminata's disenchantment with the GI world coincided with a heightened left-wing liberal politicisation, which was also attached to 'the feeling of a generation'. The attacks of 9/11 and their aftermath were the first major global political events that we experienced as teenagers with a political education. We became adults around that time, being 17 in 2001, finishing school while taking to the streets to participate in big demonstrations against the Iraq War. We would meet up at the demonstration and encounter young people from other schools as well. The demonstrations actually became spaces for hanging out together. Around that time, Aminata knew GIs who had to go to Iraq as soldiers. As her involvement with the GI world diminished,

her politicisation not only towards the left but also towards Black German and anti-racist politics grew (I will discuss this in the next chapter).

Maya also became disenchanted with the USA, but for different reasons. It was not so much linked to her dissociation with the cultural workd of the GIs in Frankfurt, but more with the experiences she had when travelling to the USA to visit family. For Maya, the USA had become very important, especially because of the ideas she had absorbed as a child and teenager through contact with her fathers' colleagues and by reading Black American authors. Yet her first visit caused her to revise her image of the USA as a dreamland: 'I have a better life in Germany. It is better in the urban centres in the USA for Black people but in small towns...' The USA had been an ideal, especially with regard to a potential life as a Black person there, but seeing the reality that many African Americans faced, especially the poverty and the poor healthcare services made her not want to move their anymore. She was equally astounded to sense that there was a gulf between African migrants and African Americans and not the solidarity she had hoped for. The desire to live in the USA began to diminish and, much like Aminata, her orientation in terms of Afrodiasporic identity shifted towards West Africa.

Lafia T. – Growing up in a white and female world

Lafia T's relationship to her Senegalese origins through her father was more distant than was the case for Aminata or Maya. And although all three grew up in Frankfurt and knew some of the same people and places, the GI world was not part of her reality. Aminata and Maya began to deal with their African descent early on; because they grew up with their fathers, it was part of their childhood and it continued through their contacts with GI culture. For Lafia, the process began later and was mediated by different influences.

Being invited into Lafia's home

I meet Lafia at midday in Frankfurt at a metro stop, and she recognises me straight away, which surprises me a bit, as we haven't seen each other for many years. In fact, it is the first time that I have ever talked to her; until now I only knew her from friends of friends at school.

I contacted her a few weeks ago over the internet. She had liked a post by me, an article from a photographer who travelled in Senegal. I decided to contact herbecause I knew that she had Senegalese origins and asked her if she would be interested in participating in my research, and she wrote back that she would.

We talk about old times as teenagers, about Bettina High School – a school neither of us attended but where we both had friends. Her son goes there and is already in 6th grade. Although she lives in Offenbach (a small town so close

to Frankfurt that it is almost a city neighbourhood), she says that Bockenheim and Westend (two neighbouring central districts) have always been her hood (Kiez). Her mother lived there until recently as do her husband's parents, who often take care of her son.

We go home to her flat in Offenbach where she lives with her 11-year-old son and husband. She makes us tea and tells me that she works in two hospitals at the moment and is writing her thesis; 'That's a lot', I tell her and begin to explain a bit more about my project. In her living room, there are lots of photographs, and one in particular in black and white catches my attention, in which her father is holding her in his arms when she was a little child. 'What a beautiful picture', I remark. She laughs – they have only recently changed the photo's position; before that it was hanging elsewhere, and no one noticed it. Now in the new place, everyone spots it and tells her how nice they find it. Well, it is nice. I immediately gravitated towards this picture, because both the people in the picture are smiling, particularly her father, who looks happy and proud. They both have the same smile, I think to myself.

After a little while her son comes home, and we make pancakes. He has never seen me before but seems at ease with people he does not know. 'He is used to it', Lafia reassures me 'We lived in shared flats when he was little'. After eating pancakes and chatting with her son about German grammar we start our interview. (Fieldnote, 22 November 2017)

When I met Lafia her for the first time, while conducting fieldwork in Frankfurt in November 2017, she was training to be a psychotherapist and working at two different clinics. Today (2020) – as a woman in her early thirties – she is a trained child and adolescent psychotherapist, doing a PhD on motherhood in the context of migration and interculturality, and teaching psychoanalytical theories. A few days before we first met, I wrote that we could possibly also look at travel pictures. During our meeting, she then told me that she had been a bit worried about my intentions. Though her father is from Senegal, she had never been there; her father lives in Heidelberg with his second wife and son and only rarely goes to Senegal. They (she and her father) had planned a trip there for December 2017, but they had to cancel, which has not been easy for Lafia. Because, as I begin to understand, it is an important and conflicted topic in her life – the fact that she has never been to the country of her father. Lafia has something unapproachable in her attitude, from her reactions sometimes I do not know how she feels about things. But when she laughs this dissipates and a sympathetic aura spreads around her. With Lafia I had three official and recorded interviews and many other meetings and conversations over the course of my research. In our second interview (before she had been to Senegal) Lafia talked a lot about the role that the country played during her life, and that there were many turning points when she was in her mid-twenties (her professional development as a

psychotherapist especially) which made her feel she wanted to explore this unknown heritage.

I am going to start this subchapter by exploring Lafia's life story and how she relates to Senegal through her father but was influenced by growing up in Frankfurt in a mostly white and middle-class environment. How did her relationship to the country of parental origin develop in her life and how did she deal with growing up as person of African descent in Germany?

Lafia's early childhood in Heidelberg and Frankfurt

Lafia was born in 1986 into a 'big hodgepodge' (*Kuddelmuddel*) in Heidelberg – a popular small student city one hour from Frankfurt, which was also much influenced by US military settlements. Her parents, her father from Senegal and her mother from a little town in Germany, met in a shared flat (*Wohngemeinschaft*) – a very popular living set-up, especially since the 1968 generation.

There were always a lot of people around. 'When you think about that time, in the intellectual left wing scene these were the times when '*Multikulti*'[the idea of living in a multicultural world side by side] was an approach to life', she starts. And when she thinks back, this is what her life felt like too. She was often the only or almost the only dark-skinned child around, but the attitude conveyed by the people around her was 'society is colourful and that is a good thing', as far as Lafia remembers. She was also involved to a small degree in the Senegalese-German or African German community in Heidelberg when she was little, which means she also knew some other kids with West African fathers and German mothers: 'Wait a minute... no; for all the couples I can think of, it was the man who was African and the woman German', she adds. Most African students in Germany at the time were men (Pugach 2015).

Her neighbourhood was Heidelberg-Weststadt, and this is where she spent her first seven years. Lafia remembers that she had incredible freedom of movement there; even as a young child she was able to wander the streets with friends without her parents worrying very much.

And as she recalled, 'it was *kuddelmuddelig*' [describing a chaotic though pleasant situation], with a lot of we sleep over there or they sleep over here'. And of her parents: 'It is not like they were together and then they separated, they were never really a couple as I remember it, and I lived with my mother and visited my father.' This is how she recalls the living arrangement.

Lafia speaks a bit about her parents. Her mother left her own parents' house rather early, before she had turned 18, and went to study Art in Vienna. When she finished, she came to Heidelberg and was part of artsy alternative left-wing post-1968 groups. Her father studied macroeconomics but never finished and instead embraced a 'bohemian lifestyle' and started to earn his money from translation and teaching jobs. Lafia recalls that he always wanted to study philosophy and was happy

to come to Heidelberg, where many of his idols had studied and lived. He married his current wife when Lafia was about three years old and lived in Heidelberg with his wife and son, who is about 18 today. Moving to Frankfurt was not an easy decision for her mother.

Lafia and her mother led a very socially active life in Heidelberg, with a lot of friends. Her mother's decision to go to Frankfurt to work as graphic designer was driven by a desire to make life economically better as a single mum. 'So it was kind of like an internal migration... At least I didn't want to move', Lafia remembers. They moved to Nordend, a rather bourgeois, middle-class neighbourhood of Frankfurt, and she saw her father on weekends. But it was not easy for him to maintain a relationship with his young daughter. When they saw each other he tried to produce a sense of normality between them, a sort of feeling of everydayness:

> But, well, it is not easy for weekend dads. Like from time to time when he was sitting with some of his Senegalese friends, he would come and say 'Lafia go get us some tea.' Things like that to produce a feeling as if I was always there. But for me, coming from an all-female household and feminist education, that was not normal for me of course.

Here Lafia explains how, ever since she was a young child, the world of her father seemed strange, far from the normality of her 'all female and feminist' household. While her relationship with her father remained distant, Lafia got along with his German wife. When Lafia spent time with them, she talked more to her and did things with her as a child and teenager. Her father also tried to do activities with Lafia but, as she recalls, found it sometimes difficult to motivate his young daughter to play tennis with him or do other things.

Dealing with Senegal as a child

> 'My father has gone such a long way and now I sit here [...] I lead a very bourgeois German life' (Lafia, Interview 2, 22.11.2017)

When Lafia was a teenager it became even more difficult for her father to see her: 'I began to cancel on him regularly', she explains. The time came when she wanted to distance herself from her father and, with that, also from her Senegalese origins. Aminata also went through a phase of distancing herself from her father, but for her it was also important to find a personal African identification besides her Guinean origins. This did not play such a big role in Lafia's teenage years. Although her dad had tried to arrange a trip together to Senegal, it had never worked out so far. Lafia describes that fact today as an 'irritation in her biography'. For various reasons, her

trip to Senegal was often postponed. And when I told her that I was also interested in the role of travel, she spoke about that issue:

> Travelling also plays a role in my connection to my father. Because I made several trips with my mother, and there is still something that I feel is an irritation in my biography, namely I was in Kenya at about 10/11, with my mother, it was a malaria region, so you needed a prophylaxis, and now at 31, I still haven't been to Senegal. The region where my father comes from is also a Malaria region, and that was often given as a reason not to go there, because I had such an awful experience with malaria prophylaxis in Kenya that I did not want to take it again. [...] But in retrospect it is so stupid, when I tell that story I am like, what? Why haven't you at least been to Senegal instead? (Interview 22.11.2017)

It is precisely because Lafia has *not been there* that Senegal possesses inflated significance for her. She feels that the trip to Kenya when she was about ten years old was the first incident of many which led her to constantly postpone her origin journey. From a very early age, it was difficult to build a relaxed or neutral relationship to the country of her father; it quickly became associated with fear, and it was complicated to overcome that fear. Continuing her travel-related narration, she then looks at the role travel has played in her family history, comparing the life of her father – including his transnational migration from Senegal to Germany – and her life, including her class and social milieu:

> When I think about it, travel is also related to... something sad... When you travel, you encounter destinies in the world; that is a characteristic of travelling, I guess, and that is something that very often afflicts me. When you suddenly realise your own enormous privilege. And that is again something biographical. My father finished school in Dakar at 18 and somehow made it to Germany with a scholarship to Heidelberg, now he is in his mid-50s, [has lived] in Germany since then, has gone back to Senegal only for short visits. [S]omehow I am always pushed to the reflection: What are the odds, how likely is it [...] that my life would have been sooo different? That my father would have stayed there or I don't know what could have happened.

She associates travelling with thinking about geopolitical privilege. The privileges that coming from a rich country in the Global North entails become particularly evident while travelling – how a passport opens doors, how a little money at home can be a lot of money elsewhere. For Lafia, there is another level that comes into play as well. She also realises that her father did not share these privileges she had as a young person, which creates a gap between her and him. Lafia stresses the differences between her and her father to make sense of their distant relationship. It is

also tricky to imagine what his life in Senegal actually looked like, because she has never visited Senegal and cannot associate any memories with it.

> But what's more is that my father has gone such a long way, and now I sit here, and also through the separation of my parents, I lead a very bourgeois German life, where it is not really a big issue whether I have Senegalese roots or not, Asian or American or whatever. I mean from the milieu, from the class, the friends that I have, the life, the job, the whatever, the choice of a partner [her husband is white German-Irish] all that was somehow not influenced by the fact that my father actually had lived in such a different life or world.

Lafia noted in a different conversation that she had started to think about and deal with the history and experience of her father more when she became herself an adult. The quote above speaks to many issues in transnational migration and of being part of the second generation born in a different country than a parent. For one, it shows how distant Lafia feels (or felt for a long time) from 'being Senegalese'. Her father is Senegalese, but Lafia had no points of identification besides him, and she did not identify with him for ages. She was socialised in Germany, and in general her life and growing up took place in a white and upper middle-class environment. She feels distant from the life her father lived in Senegal and does not know much about it or about their family there. This is very different from Aminata or Maya. Aminata spent a few years living in Guinea as a child, and although she describes it as an expat life, she has a genuine feeling for how life in Guinea was, it is part of her lived reality and she met her grandparents and aunts and uncles there. Maya, although she did not live in Sierra Leone, was very connected to her Sierra Leonian origins as she grew up with her father, who was very active in the diaspora community, and she was part of a big Sierra Leonian family. It was a normal part of her everyday life in Germany, not something strange or unfamiliar as it seemed for Lafia as a child. Maya and Aminata did not have an easy relationship with their fathers either, but being German and Guinean or Sierra Leonian and German was not lived as a contradiction by them. Today, as a woman in her thirties, Lafia tries to bridge that gap and has started to be much more interested in two things: what it means to be a person of African descent in Germany and Europe, and what it means for her to have Senegalese family.

Being a teenager out of place – experiencing racialisation

Reflecting on what it was like to grow up in highly educated middle-class family surroundings in Frankfurt, where people usually made sure to show that they were open-minded and tolerant, and where she usually did not feel that having brown skin and curly hair mattered at all, let alone negatively, Lafia could still remember moments – especially during her teenage years – when she felt she did not fit in be-

cause of her looks. This is something she has in common with Aminata, who also felt – although she was not an outsider at all and was in fact quite popular – that her looks were outside of the norm and made her unattractive in the eyes of boys or young men. As Lafia recounted:

> I have the feeling that I was always exotic or out of time for my age group. When I think about being 11, 12, 13, 14 there was something… I was out of the girls mainstream. At school, one guy I was in love with for a long time, he also often made [thinking] – yes it was strange, he always made jokes; he was a bit of a cynical, ironic person, he always made jokes about my being African, he is for me an example that I was not in the mainstream. He made comments, always in a funny way but like 'Lafia we have PE today, and I forgot my things so I wanted to ask you if you could make sure that we don't go outside by doing a rain dance?' […] And now I'm thinking: Why does it have to be the rain dance, so clichéd, you cannot be more trivial. And why does it have to be about my being black?

Lafia uses the word 'mainstream' three times in this extract, which underscores how much she really did feel outside of the norm as a teenager because of her ethnicity. She does stress that she grew up in a multicultural bubble, but that bubble was still white; it was an attitude that was transmitted by her close family: Appearance should not matter. But she was still confronted at school with being the only Afrodescendant child in her friendship group, which was something that was commented about or made fun of. At school she was confronted with how much her appearance mattered in making her feel different from what she considered to be mainstream.

The historical and political context and ideologies that she grew up with in her family and environs were very different from those that the Afro-German activists Ika Hügel-Marshall (born 1947) and May Ayim (born 1960) tell of in their writings (1998, 1997). Both grew up in conservative and working-class circles, where they encountered significant racism and discrimination, even within their close families. Although Lafia had a family background that protected her from experiencing racism in her intimate circle, she was still confronted with everyday racialised stereotypes about Africans that made her feel uncomfortable, and she was often the only person of African descent in her upper middle-class surroundings in Frankfurt.

Her environment today has changed in that regard. Now she often tells me about friends of hers who are also 'mixed' – who have one African and one German parent and Lafia does feel that this is a connecting element for them, especially when they are of similar age and live similar lifestyles. Even without being part of any Black or feminist political groups or networks, sharing one's stories and experiences with a group of people who have an embodied knowledge of racialisation/racism has become important in Lafia's life (more on this aspect of development in Chapter 7).

Reluctance to deal with origins

In one of our interview sessions, Lafia narrated her life story in relation to Senegal. It is easy to perceive how her not dealing with Senegal was closely linked to her relationship with her father. The idea that she might like to explore her roots had been put forward, among others, by her mother and father – but Lafia explains how this wish first had to grow within herself and not only be due to pressure from the outside.

> The idea that it would be nice to go there has always existed. And for my father, I think I understand that now, it was always about 'my mother the authority, demands that of me and wishes to see her granddaughter. And I as a son have to present her.' You know? [...] And then of course, I want to show you my country, but I think his mother's wish was more central to him. And then there was always a thing – and my mother participated in that – a 'you have to know your roots', and this is also a part of you; but after a while this became like an empty shell, from time to time it was like 'sure, you have to', and I thought less and less 'Yes I want to know my roots and a part of me'. For a long time it was my father and pressure from outside, and I *should*, but it is not *me* who was curious.[...] And then between 11 and 12 and I don't know – *now*, a few years ago [she laughs] the relation between me and my father was also an obstacle, because there was a big distance between us, and it was somehow clear that if I go, I go with him, because of course I want to meet the family then and I can't just go to my father and ask 'Can you please write down grandma's address?' So somehow that was clear, and especially during my teenage years I rejected him so much, and I just didn't feel like it, I simply couldn't imagine travelling with him back then. (Interview 6 December 2017)

The reluctance to deal with origins is related to factors concerning Lafia's family in Germany while she was growing up. Today as an adult, Lafia often reflects on why she was not more interested in her origins before. She is also pushed to do so more today through her psychoanalytical training. The quote above brings up many aspects of why young Lafia was not interested. At the centre stands her difficult and distant relation to her father. Although her parents tried to explain her as a child that it was important to 'explore her roots', she was not able to make that wish her own. Lafia was not part of the world of her father and thus Senegalese cultural practices were not part of her daily existence:

> I remember in my youth [...] something that was often mirrored back to me, especially by kids from Bettina [high school friendship groups in the Westend neighbourhood, which I also know], is that no one could be more German than me. And I have [experienced] that with others sometimes, when I notice someone has roots from another country, but makes an effort to be *so* German, or

is emphasising his or her Germanness – that causes me irritation [pause for thought] and I think that something grew within me, this 'I need to go there.'

Lafia remembers that when she was a child, some friends of hers from another high school (she went to Goethe school but had many pals at Bettina school, which is how our circles merged) reflected to her that 'One could not be more German than her'. On the one hand, friends reflected to her that she was indeed very German, while on the other, she also had friends who made fun of her African origins. Reflecting on these comments today makes Lafia realise that she put quite a bit of effort into stressing her Germanness when she was younger. Today she feels that she should not negate her Senegalese origins but rather try to own them and not see them as contradicting her Germanness. With that realisation, an interest in Senegal began to grow and a wish to travel there was part of it.

> Silvia: Ok but at first, you said, there was a defensive attitude? Lafia: Yes, for a really long time.
> Silvia: And why do you think that was?
> Lafia: Mmm, well the relation to my father ... er, it's a bit ... maybe let's start the other way around. A few weeks ago we saw a documentary, about Dakar.

Instead of telling me why she thinks she had a defensive attitude towards Senegal for so long, she continues from the other end of the story, explaining where and how she became interested in it. One factor was watching a documentary about Dakar, which I will come back to a bit later. At that moment in our interview, I hoped we would get back to the why she had not been interested for so long. Eventually we did.

To answer my question about why it was that she rejected Senegal for so long as part of her life, Lafia chose instead to tell a story about a friend of hers, which she then related to herself. Telling someone else's tale helped her to classify or make sense of her own experience; she sees her own experience reflected in that of her friend. The story is about a friend who is also Senegalese-German finding out that she has a half-brother. After finding out about this half-brother, and the second family of her Senegalese father, this friend of Lafia's tells her that she is actually not interested in getting to know her half-brother. Lafia found that reaction very sad, but could relate to it, as she saw it reflected in her own rejection of Senegal as a whole: 'Be it a brother or a whole country that you don't want to travel to... all because of concepts that we should maybe start to question!'

But what concepts is Lafia talking about? She takes the French philosopher Didier Eribon's autobiography Retour a Reims (2009) as an example to talk about the bourgeois family ideal and the feeling of shame and embarrassment that is produced when you and your family members do not fit these norms. This is something that Eribon explains in detail in his autobiography, which recounts his origins in a white

working-class family and the many ways he did not fit into that lifeworld due to his interest in philosophy and his homosexuality. Lafia finds herself and her reactions reflected in many parts of the book. She also felt that her family relations deviated from the German bourgeois ideal. She did not grow up in that ideal of the nuclear family: Her parents separated early. This led to her growing up apart from her father. The relations between her parents were complicated and difficult to deal with. But her family also deviated from the norm in that her father was Senegalese, not German and not white. For a long time, she conceived of herself by identifying with the family from her mother's side, which is white, German and upper-middle class, and with whom she spent a lot of time. At the same time, she rejected identification with her Senegalese father whose surroundings were unfamiliar to her; she felt unable to connect with him and far away from his reality of being a Senegalese migrant in Germany. Some of the feelings and analysis that Eribon describes in relation to himself and his family resonate with Lafia, especially the aspect of shame. The rejection of her father was related to feeling of embarrassment; he deviated from the family she felt close to in terms of racialisation and class. When people made fun of her African origins, Lafia felt embarrassed, and that embarrassment was projected onto her father. He was the reason she deviated from the mainstream, so she blamed him. Only as an adult did she reflect upon that rejection of her father and towards being Senegalese as something odd – as something she wants to make sense of today by actively exploring her origins.

Conclusion

Blackness as an Afrodiasporic identity marker became important for Aminata as a young teenager and she began to develop a Black identity through her contact to the GI scene, which forged a positive sense of gendered and racialised identity. For Maya, Blackness was also important, but more because of her early intellectual engagement with Black American literature and the fact that her father worked in an American environment. However, Blackness was not an important identity reference for teenage Lafia. She rather felt disconnected from any kind of Afrodiasporic identity and struggled with her Senegalese origins. The experiences and feelings of these three women when growing up thus differed, especially regarding gendered and racialised identity formation, although they share the same class background. Although both Aminata and Lafia felt out of place in terms of Germany beauty standards, Aminata found in Black America a beauty ideal where she fitted in. All three also have things in common, especially as they come from families with left-wing liberal political views and were never made to feel racism in their intimate circles – Aminata and Maya because they grew up with their African fathers and Lafia because her mother and wider family circle affirmed cultural diversity as positive. Moreover, aside from their differences, they also frequented many of the same spaces in Frank-

furt and share many references and memories of major global and local events. Aminata grew up living a transnational life living between Conakry and Frankfurt as a child but with Frankfurt always as her home base. Maya lived in Frankfurt throughout her childhood but in a very Sierra Leonian environment with her father and stepmother. When they were teenagers around the turn of the millennium, 'Black America became an object of diasporic longing' (Nassy Brown 1998, p. 311) – much like Nassy Brown explains for Black Liverpudlians in the 1970s and 1980s. The influence of American and African American culture, in particular, for the coming of age of the generation born in the 1980s in Germany was huge. It was even more important in parts of Germany where there still were US military bases and their entertainment infrastructures, which many Germans interested in Hip Hop, RnB and Soul used to frequent in the 2000s.

Although the intersection of racial and gendered identity begins to be consciously important to teenagers, as they enjoy the first freedoms of going out, class consciousness at that stage is still rather nebulous. For these young women, class was a habitus they did not reflect upon. Nevertheless, class relations always did matter in various ways, but it was only as they became adults that these women began to make sense of experiences and relationships more in terms of a shared identity as middle class (Carbonella and Kasmir 2015). When, for example, Aminata thinks about the GI spaces today, class distinctions clearly already mattered back then – it mattered in these spaces where she would compare herself to other women and it manifested after a while in her feeling disconnected and losing interest in GI men. Her dealings with the GI spaces can show how class is always a process in the making and brought to consciousness through different relationships, as August Carbonella and Sharryn Kasmir explain (2015). The cultural aspect of performing Blackness through Hip Hop and RnB subculture in and around Frankfurt was in the foreground at first. It was a way to identify with a bigger group of peers by sharing the same subculture in the city and being part of a community. It was also a way to deal differently with her mixed German-Guinean heritage than through her family, at an age when one usually wants to distance oneself from one's parents. The GI spaces gave Aminata the opportunity to be Black just like many Americans were – only she was Black and German.

In Lafia's reflections as an adult, class also began to matter more, especially in terms of her thinking how being part of a white feminist liberal educated middle class contributed to her feeling disconnected from the world of her father. For Aminata and Maya, identifying as Black created a positive sense of self as well as a group identity based on a positive and cool sense of racial identity. Lafia had to struggle more with being of African descent when she was a teenager. Having a distant relationship with her father, she was not at ease with seeing herself as related to Senegal and questions like *Where are you from?* could feel uncomfortable – especially because the answer *From here!* was not enough for most people.

4. Family affairs – an intergenerational approach to diaspora

'For my children it is different, they were born here, they always tell me that.'
Lamine Camara, father of Aminata, on political discussions with his children

'My parents always told me there is nothing wrong with you, there is something wrong with them.[…] Anyways I was always happy to have my father as a role-model.'
Maya on the importance of her parents and especially her father for growing up as a person of African descent in Germany

In the previous chapter, generation mattered in the way that people of the same generation create a 'generational conscience' (Assaf 2017) and in terms of how a feeling of a generation is produced by shared memories of growing up in the same city and using the same spaces. It focused on capturing the feeling of a generation, taking Aminata, Maya and Lafia's life in Frankfurt as a key point of departure to explore how time and place influence the practice and understanding of selfhood and how race, gender and class matter. But it also showed how people who belong to the same generation can have very different experiences and practices, as Lafia's experiences of growing up revealed. In this chapter, generation matters in terms of intergenerational relations within a family. A generational lens highlights how age, historical and geographical context can influence how migrants and the second generation – the children of migrants – relate to a country of origin throughout their lives. In the present study, we are considering women born and/or socialised in Germany and their parent/s who migrated to Germany in the 1970s mostly as students from a variety of West African countries. Generation here is looked at more in terms of intrafamily relations, but also taking into account historically grounded experiences.

The meanings of social and genealogical generation have to be seen as interconnected. It is also because Lamine Camara lived through different times and events in Guinea and Germany that he perceives of himself differently than his daughter, Aminata. Lamine Camara, who arrived in Germany in the 1970s, will be presented in more detail in this chapter. I am interested in examining how the meaning of diaspora shifts across generations and how it can be disentangled from a country of origin and evolve from centred towards more decentred diasporic practices of belonging.

I will discuss the historical circumstances under which Lamine Camara grew up in Guinea – the earliest days of a decolonised republic – and came to Germany, in the direct aftermath of the 1968 revolution. This historical context is important in order to understand Lamine Camara's political engagement as highly educated member of the Guinean diaspora living in Germany. This story will then be complemented with Aminata's process of becoming 'politically Black' in her twenties and getting involved in Black and African diaspora movements. I will follow the process and the events that led her to be involved in anti-racism campaigning and with Black political organisations and how that shift also led to her wanting to deal more with her Guinean and West African heritage with her own family as an adult. I argue that Aminata's encounter with Black activism and Black and feminist literature has led to a 're-storying of self', to take up a term coined by feminist scholar Lekkie Hopkins (2001, p. 1), which describes transformative processes for women through the encounter with feminist scholarship. It led Aminata to rethink her past and future in relation to Black and feminist themes.

The interview with Lamine Camara took place in August 2018 in Frankfurt. As most of the empirical material I use to illustrate the lives of Aminata and her father Lamine Camara stems from biographical interviews, the events and experiences narrated have to be seen not as objective truths but as reinterpretations of events.

Lamine Camara – Aminata's father

Lamine Camara was born in Conakry in Guinea just four years before independence from French colonial rule. He was enrolled at school in 1958, the year Guinea became independent, a turbulent time in which the country had to renegotiate its position on the global stage. As it was the first country to achieve independence from France, something that France opposed, the new Guinean state had a difficult start. After Guinea's independence and the pronouncement of the first Guinean Republic in 1958, single-party rule was quickly installed by the PDG (Party démocratique de Guinée) under Sékou Touré, which lasted until his sudden death in 1984 (Camara 2014). The need for single-party rule was justified as a means of integrating

multi-ethnic populations and in terms of a decolonial rhetoric of the national unity of Guineans in opposition to the former coloniser, which opposed independence and imposed many economic sanctions and froze Guinean assets. Guinea broke off diplomatic relations with France from 1965 to 1975. And it was in 1975, after relations were restored, that Lamine Camara went to France, from where he continued to Germany.

From the late 1960s, the PDG party swiftly radicalised. The regime feared being overthrown (and there were indeed attempts to do so) and imprisoned those it considered political opponents. Sékou Touré's conception of power became more and more violent and justified as 'revolutionary violence' the establishment of 'People's absolute power' (Camara 2014, p. 135). Lamine Camara went to school under single-party rule and later to university, where he began to study Economics. In 1975, after his first year, he decided to leave for Europe, as he felt the socialist regime had turned into a dictatorship:

> The regime was closed; you were not allowed to leave the country; it was dangerous! The conditions were like in the GDR; it was like a prison. If you could get fake papers, you could get out. [...] So many pupils and students left back then.
> Immigration was mainly pupils and students, those who were a bit more wealthy could go to Europe. Back then, not like today, there was no visa between West Africa and France. The visa came later. You just needed to get a plane ticket, or there was the ship as well, between Dakar, Abidjan and Marseille. [...] And then when I was in France, I didn't want to study in France, under no circumstances. I wanted to study in a country where I had to learn a new language. That was either in England or Germany.

Lamine Camara is aware that it would be more complicated for him today, now that you need a visa, which can be very tricky to get – especially if you do not have a job in the country you want to go to. He arrived in France at the age of 21 and stayed at a friend's place in Strasbourg. From there he applied for study scholarships in Germany and England. West Germany and the United Kingdom had been the first states to officially recognise Guinea in 1958. West Germany did so in part because it felt under pressure to do so before Guinea turned to East Germany. By 1959, the Guinean government had begun to talk with East Germany about the provision of scholarships for Guinean students to study in the GDR. West Germany reacted quickly and offered a scholarship programme of its own.[1] The historian Mohamed Saliou Ca-

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1   The period of difficult relations between Guinea and France was used by the GDR to increase their influence in Guinea, but the FRG was quick in reacting, increasing financial aid, technical and educational cooperation. After rumours that Guinea had sent an ambassador to the GDR, the FRG removed its own ambassador from Guinea. But soon afterwards, when Guinea

mara calls the relations of Guinea with the two German states a *ménage à trois* (2014, p. 203). Guinea was among the first countries to have bilateral agreements with Germany for student scholarship programmes as well as workers' programmes.

Lamine Camara applied at a student foundation that framed its scholarship programmes in terms of humanitarian aid; its aim was to help students who had escaped from communist countries. While people from Guinea were accepted as students and political refugees in West Germany, others applied for scholarships in the GDR, too. There, they were received as fellow socialists, receiving an education they should use as leaders of their socialist homelands.

In writing about Aminata's father, I want to stress the cosmopolitan openness inherent to his narrative. Although the difficulties he faced in his birth country were a motivation to leave, there is much more to it than that: a wish to discover the world, to learn a new language, to experience different cultures all spurred him on and in the end brought him to Frankfurt. He was able to move and to migrate to Europe because he belonged to a wealthier class in Guinea. As he says in the quote above, back in the 1970s it was mostly students who left – or those who could afford it. The movement of highly educated people is seldom emphasised in 'South-to-North' migration studies, where the focus is often on economic hardship as main motivator to migrate. But the emigration of Lamine Camara was not catalysed by economic hardship; he left in order to continue higher education and to be able to engage politically.

After applying for scholarships in Germany and the United Kingdom, Lamine Camara got his first positive answer from a student foundation in Bonn, West Germany, and therefore decided to go there and not to England. The answer from England came much later, after he was already in Germany. In 1976, his life in Germany started with an intensive language course in Marburg, where he lived with a host family, of whom he has fond memories, and soon he went to Frankfurt to study economics. He lived there in a student residence, which is where he met his future wife, Sabine. She was studying to become a teacher of German and English. After one year of intensive preparation, he began his studies and was among the first on his course to graduate.

Already interested in politics in Guinea, Lamine Camara got to know the spirit of the 1968 generation in Frankfurt. When he came to Germany the battle was ongoing between the state and the RAF (*Rote Armee Fraktion*) urban guerrilla group. The group had been formed against the backdrop of the 1968 rebellions against an authoritarian state and education system, which still included former Nazis in their ranks, as well as against authoritarian parents (Trunius 2007). The revolts that started in 1968

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announced that it had not in fact sent an ambassador to the GDR, diplomatic relations between Guinea and the FRG were normalised. This event in 1958 is known as the Guinea Crisis (Blumenau 2011, Kilian 2001).

led to big liberal changes in the state apparatus and the education system in the 1970s (Borneman 1992). The protest movement started at the universities, the point of departure for Lamine Camara.

> Silvia: And the Uni then, was it still what you call today 'the '68'? Did you feel something of that?
> Lamine C: When I was at the University in the 1970s, the generation of 1968 was still there. Many were still at the Uni. [...] I don't know if you know the story, but the terrorists from the RAF, some of them were with us at the University in Frankfurt. There was a famous terrorist, Jan-Carl Raspe, he was at the Uni. I am from that generation [...]. We were all young at the time, in our early twenties.
> Silvia: That's pretty young. I am sure that must have been a turbulent time then?
> Lamine Camara: Sure, sure, Frankfurt was left. The lefties were all here. Frankfurt was a left-wing city. Joschka Fischer [Green Party politician], they were all here. The Uni was very left. And when I came to Germany, there was only one metro line, U1.

Since the 1960s, Frankfurt has been a hub for Transatlantic student links, and there were relations with organisations like the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) in Berkeley and San Francisco, important centres of the student protests and supporters of the Civil Rights movement (Klimke & Scharloth 2016, Klimke 2011).

Frankfurt was also a centre for international students, and it was in the nearby city of Göttingen, a student town, where the AASU (Afro-Asian Student Union) had been founded by Jamaican and Indian students in 1956. With the presence of international students and workers from the Global South, new African diaspora networks emerged, working on issues within and outside Germany and forming diverse pan-African coalitions (DHM 2016). But Lamine did not have much contact with other African students besides the few Guinean ones. There were a few Africans at the University, but most were from East Africa, and he did not hang out with them. Instead, he had his small Guinean group:

> Lamine Camara: I remember we were – how many Guineans at the Uni? Maybe four or five.
> Silvia: And they all knew each other?
> Lamine Camara: Yes, sure. We were together, had our group in the *Mensa* [refectory]. That's for sure, as usual. You look for your fellow citizens [*Landsleute*] everywhere.

When it comes to Lamine Camara's political engagement, he was less interested in pan-African political movements and instead very active in Guinean diaspora politics. As many Guineans left the country, a Guinean diaspora politics quickly developed in Europe after independence in 1958. By 1984, the number of Guinean exiles

was estimated to be over two million. And many of those were well-educated professionals and students. As it was impossible to operate in the country, many members of the political opposition in Guinea – who usually belonged to upper social and economic milieus – fled to other countries. Guinea has a long history of active political opposition among the diaspora (Camara 2014); Lamine Camara became part of the opposition as soon as he went to France. To this day, his efforts are directed towards achieving political change in Guinea.

After moving abroad, Lamine first joined the RGE (*Regroupement des Guinéens de l'étranger*). The RGE was an organisation that fought against the dictatorship of Sékou Touré and had sections operating on all continents. Later on, Lamine became a member of the Guinean party UFDG (*Union des forces démocratiques de Guinée*) the main opposition party. Founded in the early 2000s, ithas many members living outside of Guinea and its candidate almost won the 2010 election. However, Lamine Camara has recently left the party. In January 2020, Aminata told me that her father had officially announced his resignation from the UFDG because of a disagreement. He felt the party was trying to attract voters along ethnic lines, and he did not agree with those tactics. He always believed that this was one of the big problems of Guinean politics. 'We will see what he is up to next', she told me, laughing.

> Silvia: How did you become active in Guinean politics?
> Lamine Camara: I have always been active, ever since I was a young man. Since the dictatorship in Guinea we had our political movement in France in the opposition. [...] There was a student organisation of Guineans abroad. The office was in Paris, and I was also a member. [...] Today that doesn't exist anymore but there are different political parties, my party is in the opposition, and maybe we win the next time in 2020. [...] I am on the executive board and therefore I travel a lot in Europe. Recently I was in Berlin, our party in Guinea is part of the global liberal network. In Germany there is a federation, a section in Hessen, Cologne, Dortmund, Berlin and in Munich.

Since more Guineans have come to Germany since the 1990s (in 2018 there was a total of 17,000 Guinean nationals living in Germany) today there are also more Guinean political organisations in German cities, as Lamine indicates above. 'We have good chances of winning the next elections with our opposition candidate,' he explained. Using the 'we' in the sentence shows how involved he feels in the political development of his birth country. Lamine Camara's party is also part of Liberal International, the world federation of liberal democratic political parties, which is why he travels to the international liberal congresses to network. He always travels as a member of a Guinean political party but is nonetheless involved in transnational political networks, and is in contact with liberal parties around the world. So, although his engagement can be seen as centred and directed towards Guinea, the political

work itself takes place on a global scale. He knows what is going on politically in Germany, France and elsewhere in the world.

Going back to Guinea with his family

Since his move to Germany, there has been one moment in Lamine Camara's life when he felt ready and keen to go back to Guinea. He had been thinking about going back to live but for a long time it had not been practicable due to the insecure political situation. But at the end of the 1980s, a window opened for political change, and the family moved to Guinea in 1989. Lamine Camara went first, Sabine and Aminata followed:

> I came back from Colombia, did an internship for one year in an NGO, and while doing that internship I decided to go into the private sector in Guinea, I opened a business in Guinea, and Sabine and Aminata joined me later. Aminata went to French school and then we stayed there until 1993.

The sudden death of Sékou Touré in 1984 put an end to the PDG's single-party rule and a short transition period commenced, during which the CMRN (*Comité militaire pour le redressement national*) was in charge. Until 1984, very few of the two million people who had left since 1958 had ever returned to Guinea. Although Touré issued a decree encouraging Guineans in the diaspora to return and unite with their families as early as 1977, assuring them that they had nothing to fear, only a very small portion of people in the diaspora took him at his word. It was only after 1984 that some exiles took the chance, among them Lamine. Camara explains the atmosphere at the time after President Touré's death:

> Overall, a sense of relief and hope was slowly evolving among the intellectual elites, some of whom saw in the ongoing open-doors policies a key to economic recovery and meaningful reconnection with the Western world. (2014, p. 232)

Part of the CMRN's agenda was the encouragement of free enterprise as well as structural and monetary reforms (also such imposed by the SAP [structural adjustment programme]), and neoliberal reforms were therefore implemented in the former socialist state. Unfortunately, a few years after its instalment, the new CMRN regime entered into 'ethnically based power struggles' (Camara 2014, p. 268). Initially, this was a power struggle between the two leading military figures, Colonel Conté and Colonel Traoré, each of whom accused the other of favouring people from their own ethnic group (Susu or Mandenka). This led to a failed coup led by Traoré after which Lansana Conté took control of the state, backed by an alliance of Susu (his ethnic group) forces. The Second Republic was declared at the end of 1985, and Lansana Conté's government also presented many reforms that were supposed to

strengthen economic enterprise. It was around that time that Lamine Camara prepared to relocate to Conakry with his wife and daughter with the idea of becoming a businessman. But returning was not a widespread trend. On the contrary, many Guineans left the country after 1985, increasingly for economic reasons.

The security situation deteriorated in Guinea, especially due to the cross-border effects of the civil wars in the neighbouring countries Liberia (1989–97) and Sierra Leone (1991–2001), including the circulation of illegal arms and drugs and growing corruption among security forces in the early 1990s (Camara 2014). Nevertheless, Aminata's memories of her time in Guinea as a child include nothing of these dark aspects of life in Guinea. On the contrary, she felt they were living a proper expat life there with all the privileges attached to it. Her memories are very positive and all focus on leading an upper-class life with a house, a chauffeur and a swimming pool around which she played. For her father, however, living in Guinea with his family became increasingly difficult. As the political and security situation in the country deteriorated, Lamine and Sabine decided to go back to Frankfurt after four years, and Lamine Camara never tried to relocate permanently to Guinea again. He has close links in the country, though, especially through his engagement in diaspora politics. Back in Germany in 1993, he got work as an employee at a big tech company. In 1996 his second child was born, Aminata's brother. The parents divorced a few years later, but are still in contact today. Lamine Camara would not consider moving somewhere else today, 'My whole family is here', including his grandchildren. One wish of his would be to go to Guinea with his children, now that they are adults, and even to rent a flat there via an online platform.

Lamine Camara has engaged in politics on multiple levels, which range from national to international networks centred on Guinea, to more wide-ranging and decentred activities as a member of the Liberal International. Already politically engaged when he left Guinea in the 1970s, he was involved in student politics at the University in Frankfurt, while also being married to a woman, Aminata's mother, who was active in German left-wing politics. Aminata's political activities have had a different focus, drawing on the political ideals of both her father and her mother. Her geographical focus is Germany and thematically it is the fight against racism and solidarity among People of Colour and African descent that drive her diasporic political practice.

Forging a Black political consciousness and a West African identity

Although American cultural production remains an important reference for her, Aminata's interest has shifted increasingly to Black German political movements and (West) African cultural and political production since her mid-twenties. In her teenage and young adult years, she had fully indulged in the GI world and the Black

American culture it made available, and this was where she started to define her African descent, her Blackness in a positive way. After finishing school, her interests shifted and things began to be more serious, as she asked what she would do in the future. Aminata's twenties were a time when many important things happened in her life, on all levels. She needed a year after school to figure out what she wanted to do next, and for some time she worked in a bar, did an internship at a hotel and only after that did she find a degree programme that seemed to really suit her – French, Culture and Economics. This was in Mannheim and so she began to commute on a weekly basis from Frankfurt. She made really good friends in her student city and moved into a shared flat with them. But she never lost touch with Frankfurt, where Albert lived, with whom she entered into a relationship and was later to marry. He was the father of her children, and she became pregnant towards the end of her degree programme. Aminata completed her studies by the time her first child was one. She then quickly found her first job in a PR agency.

In this section we follow how Aminata's interest in Black political activism was sparked in her early twenties, as she was studying French literature and became acquainted with texts that deciphered categories such as race and gender as socially constructed (for example Simone de Beauvoir); back then she had already been interested in books from African (diasporic) writers (especially Francophone ones like Maryse Condé). She began to reflect more on topics such as sexism and racism, and also on her personal experiences as Afrodescendant woman in Germany and how experiences of racism and sexism had been a constant companion in her life. This process of deep reflection initiated through the encounter with feminist scholarship has been described in the literature as 'political and individual transformation' (Cornell 1993), 'a quasi-religious conversion' (Morley 1993, p. 122) and by Lessie Hopkins as an experience that leads to the 're-storying of the self' (2001): 'I prefer to use the term re-storying, for its emphasis on the conscious process of integrating new material to reflect on the same evidence, the same material, the same fabric of a life, anew' (p. 1). Indeed, it was writings by feminist authors as well as the discovery of Black German political blogs on the internet that gave her the intellectual tools to make sense of her own experiences of being racialised/othered in Germany, as Aminata recalls:

> It was only right before I was pregnant, that is when I discovered everything, when I was 24: Black Germans, ISD (Initiative for Black people in Germany), Noah Sow (musician, writer and activist, published the book 'Germany black and white' in 2008). [...] and there was *Krauselocke* (a natural Afro hair blog), with Esther she made the first blog, also inspired by the USA, and addressed the thing that I also was victim of: I also used Relaxer (chemical hair products to straighten curly hair) for so many years, on YouTube you find a lot of American bloggers, I watched them all. I soaked them all in. I totally dived into it.

Becoming aware of anti-racist organisations and of writer-activists such as Noah Sow, a woman only slightly older than Aminata, created points of identification for her. In the last part of the quote from Aminata above, she talks about the link between race and gender in relation to her African hair texture. Here too, it was both African American and Afro-German bloggers and authors who gave her the tools and empowerment to deal differently with her hair, to be more caring towards it. Although Aminata often had braids in school and high school, she also often straightened her hair with relaxer. And looking back at this practice gives her the chills. Chemical relaxer is a product used to straighten curly hair, but it burns your skin. Nevertheless, for a long time it was simply normal for her and many others. Through the blog *Krauselocke*, she began to think politics and Black beauty ideals together and how wearing your hair naturally was an emancipatory act and an act of self-care for Afrodescendant women.[2]

In our third interview, Aminata expanded on how she began to forge a Black political identity for herself in her mid-twenties, and especially on the whole virtual world of Blackness. Aminata described her final year at university, when she was 26, as her 'hot phase' of political engagement against racism. A key event in her life happened that she could not have anticipated: It was after an unpleasant encounter with a politician from the Green Party, whom she confronted about a racist poster, that she discovered the virtual world of Black activists in Germany.[3] A regional Green Party section had published an election poster showing a naked black female body from the waist down with a pair of white hands clasping the buttocks. The slogan on the poster said 'The only reason to choose/vote black' (the colour of the conservative Christian Democratic Party in Germany is black, and the message was directed against them. The German word 'wählen' can be translated as bith chosing and voting). Aminata, who was not the only person to perceive this poster as racist against Afrodescendant people, standing in a long history of sexualising and objectifying the black body, saw a publicity stand for the Green Party in the street and decided to talk to the person at the stand. She complained about the poster, and the middle-aged white man did not take her critique seriously and told her to not be sensitive about it, adding that the poster was not meant to be racist at all – it was just a joke. Aminata was very disappointed with that reaction from a party that presented itself as anti-racist and anti-sexist. The man made Aminata feel as if she was the problem, as if racism did not really exist in the context of the poster and was more in her head than anywhere else – that she was exaggerating.

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2   Krauselocke can be translated as 'frizzy hair'. The blog is at https://esthersiesta.com/krausel ocke/ (accessed 22 May 2020).

3   For the discussion around the poster, see the position paper of the anti-racist Black German organisation 'Der Braune Mob' here: https://blog.derbraunemob.info/wp-content/uploads/2 009/08/BKarte_Erklaerg_GruenNRW.pdf (accessed 22 May 2020).

After that encounter she felt really bad about the whole situation and began to look for support. After talking to a few people about it, Aminata was advised to contact the ISD by a friend who was knew a few of its members. When Aminata contacted the ISD online and told them about the case and her experience with the Green politician, she received a lot of support, virtually and in person by Black activists as well as her friends. In the end there were a few letters written and the poster – which had been criticised by others too – was taken down. But for Aminata, this outcome is not really what counts in retrospect. It was through that experience that she got to know the possibilities and structures of support for People of Colour and Afrodescendant people in particular.

The practice of playing down a racist or sexist offense is well known to anyone who has ever complained about such an issue. It makes it impossible for an offended person to speak of discrimination, as the existence of such an offense is not even acknowledged. If racism does not exist, then no one can be a victim of racism. Aminata tries to remember the time of the incident:

> Aminata: I had the encounter with this unpleasant Green Party politician […] what was going on politically? Why? I am not sure… Ah yes, there was Oury Jalloh,[4] there was a lot going on, and then I discovered the blog 'Der Braune Mob' and then the poster from the Green Party in Bavaria. […] But through that came the contact to ISD and I received so much support – it just has to be said – there were many people who supported me […] You were also involved. Digital politisation (*Politisierung im Netz*).
> Silvia: And Facebook.
> Aminata: Yes, it was the early days of Facebook. Sure, that was also all through Facebook, which means suddenly I knew so many, today I still know so many Black people through Facebook, in my timeline about 90 per cent, it is really a lot, I know so many from there that I don't really know but somehow we know each other.

The development of a Black political identity is also part of the process of negotiating a racialised identity in Germany, where racism and racialisation is an everyday reality for most people of African descent. For Aminata, the discovery of Noah Sow's anti-racism blog 'The Brown Mob' (*Der braune Mob*), which discussed experiences of anti-Black racism, and other blogs, websites and individuals helped her develop a political position as a Black person in Germany. Marleen de Witte (2019) describes a similar politicisation process for young adults of African descent in the Netherlands.

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4   Oury Jalloh (a man who died 2005 in a prison cell (it burnt down) and who was there without any proof of criminal activity) – this case gave rise to big demonstrations against racism and police brutality in Germany, and goes on; last year there were still demonstrations commemorating his death.

There is growing identification with Black and anti-racist social struggles among young people of Ghanaian-Dutch descent; people who have been confronted with negative stereotypes about Africa and Africans since they were small children (for example, targeting the Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) caricature. These experiences, as de Witte notes, 'stimulate an emerging black consciousness among them' (2019, p. 619); a group identity emerges based on shared experiences of discrimination. And with the digitalisation of information, this community consciousness can develop over large distances as well.

Towards identifying as West African

In her twenties and thirties Aminata went through many life-changing processes. She finished her studies, she became increasingly involved with Black and anti-racist politics in Germany, she began to wear her hair naturally, and most importantly she founded her own family and had a child with Albert. And it was especially as a result of having her own family that Aminata felt she wanted to be more connected to her Guinean or West African heritage. Today, she is reading up on the history of Guinea in the form of biographies of important and controversial political leaders such as Alpha Condé. Although the has not been back to Guinea since her childhood, her connection to West Africa has been strengthening since she has had children of her own. Together with her family, she made her first trip to Ghana a few years ago, when her son was one and her daughter four years old. They travelled to visit her husband's mother and extended stepfamily. This experience was of particular importance for her as she went to West Africa for the first time as an adult and mother (an experience of diasporic travel I describe in Chapter 8).

Aside from travelling, Aminata also tries to integrate West African culture more into her daily life in Frankfurt through food (she and her husband cook Ghanaian dishes regularly) and by organising cultural events. For instance, with some former colleagues she co-organised the first Afro-fashion fair in Frankfurt, and she is in the organising team of the annual Afrika-Fest music event, where she focuses on trying to catch the interest of younger people. She is also friends with one of her Guinean uncles and his wife. Her musical taste, in particular, has a West African character, as she keeps up to date with the music industry in Congo, Nigeria, Ghana and French-speaking West Africa, too. Of course, her husband is the biggest West African influence in her life, as he is Ghanaian-German, his father lives next door, and Albert's mother lives in Accra, which makes telephone calls with Ghana an everyday occurrence. By building a relationship and founding a family with Albert, Aminata has been able to foster her links with her West African heritage.

Aminata's development and reflexions on Afrodiasporic identity coincide with a broader generational shift. Today in Germany, and in Europe more widely, there is a growing transnational popular culture: The influence from African countries has

increased and organisations in the diaspora are increasingly Afrocentric in terms of dance, fashion, music or literature.

Through the influence of Afrodiasporic and African websites (e.g. Strolling[5] or An African City[6]), French fashion labels like Paris-based Maison Chateau Rouge[7] bloggers of African descent referring to their Afro-European identities, and print and social media such as OkayAfrica[8] young people of African descent in Germany and elsewhere have begun to look more towards the African continent for inspiration instead of the USA. The internet plays an important part in promoting the music and literature of people of African descent worldwide. Aminata uses Instagram a lot and is often inspired by bloggers of African descent in France, USA, Germany or the UK. Yet her practice is also directed towards Guinea (intellectually) and Ghana (practically). By engaging seriously with these countries, she also hopes to acquire the tools she will need to transmit that knowledge and inculcate a certain pride in being of African descent in her children.

This shift towards a more African-informed diaspora identity is not only a personal development for Aminata, but is linked to a broader development among a global middle class, and Aminata is well aware of that, as it is reflected to her in her Instagram feed on a daily basis and she performs it on digital platforms as well. One reason why this new Afro-centred focus is developing for young people of African descent and others in Europe and across the world is because a generation of digital natives has come of age; it is a generation that was born and grew up in European societies who come from families where the parents migrated from very diverse African or Caribbean countries – but still keep up links to their places of origin. This makes it easier for their children and grandchildren to keep in contact regularly with the countries of their parents' or grandparents' birth, partly also thanks to today's digital technology.

Aminata and the other participants turned increasingly towards their Guinean, Senegalese or more broadly West African origins as adults or gave their children African names; for them, these cultural practices are part of the parcel of coming of age as person of African descent. These practices are aspects of what Herbert Gans called 'symbolic ethnicity' (1979), a rediscovery of the more symbolic elements of a culture of origin, taking up of specific ethnic markers only for special occasions to

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5   For a description of the web series Strolling see: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm6554077/. Unfortunately, the creator of the series, Cecile Emeke, chose to delete all the videos as an artistic choice (accessed 14 January 2020).

6   An African city Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/AnAfricanCity – the West African counterpart to Sex and the City (accessed 14 January 2020).

7   Maison Chateau Rouge webpage: https://www.maison-chateaurouge.com/home (accessed 14 January 2020).

8   Okay Africa webpage: https://www.okayafrica.com/ (accessed 14 January 2020).

underline a personal identity – but they are more than that in the case of Afrodi-asporic identities. They are what Paul Gilroy calls a 'bulwark against the corrosive effects of racism' (1993, p. 193), turning a racialised or ethnicised stigma into some-thing positive and articulating it in a search for origins. Gilroy (1993) explains how, since the 1980s in the United Kingdom, there has been a renaissance of a 'pro-tra-ditional' side in the African diaspora movements, where one can observe the (re)in-vention of African traditions: People take on African names, wear African garments or celebrate Afrodiasporic feasts (like Kwanzaa, a week of celebrations invented by the Black Power movement in the USA in the 1960s, celebrating African heritage). These practices related to 'symbolic ethnicity' do not have to be interpreted as po-litical – they can also be seen as a wish to deal more with family history and cul-tural origins in general – but in the cases of the women I work with, they do also contain a political element. Much like the study of second-generation Italian Sene-galese youth by Riccio and Uberti (2013), the political movements that Aminata is part of are promoting '[...] youths' multiple and situational identities [...] Their pri-ority remains the fight against discrimination' (p. 236). Although some of my partic-ipants would stress a diasporic affinity for national identities (Guinean-German or Senegalese-German) or a West African identity, and would sometimes stress their differences from, for example, East African cultural practices (Frankfurt has large Ethiopian and Eritrean communities, which arrived since the 1990s, mostly as politi-cal refugees), they also embrace an identity politics of global Blackness, which unites all people of African descent in Germany, and acknowledge that they all endure the same racialising practices. Thus while they identify as Guinean-German or Sierra Leonean-German through their parents and the cultural practices they learned the young adults, they also identify with Blackness as common signifier of occupying a racialised position in German society and European societies at large. Showing sol-idarity and identifying with all Black people is a political practice and emphasising being Guinean-German or Sierra-Leonian German is more important in terms of cultural practices and identifying with family (history).

Father and daughter: Two practices of diaspora?

Involvement in transnational or diasporic activities matter not only with regard to family history and genealogy. Lamine Camara, who grew up in Guinea and came to Germany in the 1970s as a student and with the official status of a political refugee, and Aminata, who grew up in Germany in the 1980s and spent a few years of her childhood in Guinea as a German expat, made for very different experiences of what it meant to be Afrodescendant in Germany. The importance of age can be seen in how Aminata had different understandings and practices of diasporic identity while growing up, which have grown closer to her father's understanding now that she has a family of her own. The comparison of political practice between Aminata and her

father allows us not only to draw out differences but also similarities between them and shows how both practise diasporic belonging through political engagement and awareness.

Aminata learns from her father: about politics, life in Guinea and about being politically active in general; and Lamine Camara learns from his daughter: about new coalitions between people of African descent and People of Colour or about being politically active in ways other than being in a traditional political party. They are from different generations, but that does not mean that they live separate lives; their life perceptions influence each other. The generations learn from each other 'post-figuratively' (younger learn from older) as well as 'prefiguratively' (older learn from younger), to take up the models that Margaret Mead (1970) described. The models of generational learning have to be thought of as functioning together.

While Aminata's father's political work is centred on Guinea and bringing Guineans together in the diaspora, Aminata has a different practice of diaspora, which goes beyond national alliances – it relates to people of African descent living in Germany or Europe more broadly. That is because she feels rooted in Germany while occupying a racialised subject position that connects her to people of African descent and creates a shared political identification as Black – Black German or Black European for instance. But it is also due to new media and communication channels, such as Instagram, which offer novel forms of identification for a generation of Afrodiasporic youth. The weakening of ties with a country of origin that can happen for subsequent generations of descendants of migrants allows for new diasporic practices to emerge. They go in multiple directions and are not only attached to a homeland, as the example of Aminata's multicentred diasporic activities demonstrates. Trémon (2017) has shown in the case of Tahitians of Chinese descent that, rather than being limited to China, diasporic networks extend today to Canada, the USA and New Zealand, especially for later generations of descendants. The ties are not cut; they are being redirected. Yet Trémon frames the practices of first and subsequent generations differently than centred and decentred: She speaks of a passage from migratory transnationalism (for the first generation) to a diasporic transnationalism (for generations of descendants of migrants). According to Brubaker (2005), to speak of diaspora requires a practice that be sustained over time and across more than one generation, and hence as a sociological category one could not speak of diasporic practices originating from the first generation.

Aminata and her father grew up under very different historical and geographical circumstances. Their political identities were shaped by different events in their lives. Besides the different influences on the political engagement of father and daughter, there are many levels of connection, too. Both in a way practice a *centred* and a *decentred* vision of diaspora, being focused on the relation with one country in particular while also connecting transversally: In Germany, Aminata is implicated in anti-racist political movements (e.g. Black politics in Germany) and globally

she connects to Afrodescendant people through digital networks that promote, for instance, Afrocentrism in literature, music, fashion and lifestyle. Her practice of diaspora is both decentred and centred – decentred because her anti-racist work involves everyone who is racialised in Germany and her influences stem from Afrodescendant people worldwide, and centred because she is dealing more with her specific Guinean heritage, too. But Lamine Camara's practice of diaspora is also both centred and decentred – centred because his engagement is directed towards Guinea, and is decentred because he also works on the level of supranational party politics, attends meetings of the Liberal International and forges alliances that go beyond the national.

For Aminata and her peers, politics plays an important role in their understanding of their relation to parental origins. The personal development of Afrodescendant people in the generation born in Germany in the 1980s is attached to a global phenomenon of Black and Afro-centred cultural and political movements formed by people of African descent everywhere in the world, who produce nostalgia and imaginaries of connection with the African continent and are responsible for sparking interest in the search for African roots. In this way, Aminata is part of an 'imagined generation' (Eckstein 2006 p. 214) of Afrodescendant people worldwide, today connected to each other in the digital sphere, a generation that shares imaginaries via digital dissemination. Anti-racist politics, Black and Afrodescendant identities, and the search for one's own African origins are interconnected. Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001), Vivian Louie (2006) and Robert Smith (2006) have all posited that the experience of racial discrimination can increase attachment to a country of origin. Smith gives the example of Mexican Americans claiming a superiority deriving from their Mexican-ness as a reaction to racial discrimination. I believe this can be the case for many primomigrants, but it has to be reframed for the second generation. In Aminata's case, her racialised subject position led first to an involvement in Black networks in Germany, and only subsequently to increased involvement with the country of parental origin.

5. Racism and its intersection with class and gender

In German public discourse, the most persistent form of racialisation is the classification of People of Colour as 'migrants', regardless of whether they are primomigrants or belong to the second or third generation – and more precisely as migrant workers (*Gastarbeiter*) or refugees. This is why I, for instance, with my French mother and Polish surname, am not burdened by the label 'with migrant background'. But Aminata's children, born in Germany of German parents, will be confronted with racist and classist othering based on their physical appearance. As discussed in Chapter 1, the historian Fatima El-Tayeb refers to this process as 'migrantisation': Someone is constructed as migrant, an outsider to society, no matter how long their family has lived in a place and regardless of their citizenship status.

In this chapter I consider how Aminata deals with the racism and racialisation/migrantisation that she and her family have experienced and how her father Lamine Camara perceives the matter. These two examples show how the personal perception of racism is ameliorated in one's life by the acknowledgement of a good social and economic situation; or, in other words, how racism is perceived as less harmful because of a stronger socioeconomic position in comparison to others who are affected by racism differently because of a more vulnerable socioeconomic situation.

Learning to deal with it – racism and racialisation as part of the everyday

When I once asked Aminata about how she would describe her life in Germany she first described it through class terms:

> Well, actually it's good, in a global context very good, first class. '*Innergerman*' [in terms of Germany] [She laughs] I would say I am middle range; I mean we work day by day, we have to pull two kids through, we have a good living standard, but we also have to work hard for it, and most certainly we don't get anything for free […] But we have what we need to have a good life. And above all we have

a lot of friends, family, a network, so our life is a good one. (Phone conversation 22 November 2018)

She describes her life in Germany in terms of belonging to a middle class which has to work hard to maintain what is has achieved and, in social terms, as having good family and friend networks. But experiences of racism or being racialised are part of life for Aminata too, and questions like *Where are you from?* or *Why is your German so good?* are only some of the things she has heard from an early age. They have contributed to a feeling of being othered in Germany. The first thing that helped Aminata cope with racialisation when she was younger was reading Afro-German authors who wrote about experiences of racism and about structural racism.

> At first I found myself in all of them. The books are all about, for example Manuela Ritz [*Die Farbe meiner Haut* (2009), *The Colour of My Skin*] and many other authors, it's a lot about pain, it is about simply talking about it, talking about the fact that you are discriminated against and on how many levels you are, and there I found myself in many things, in the everyday life in a train/metro, and something happened here and there was a strange look, it was about *naming* these microaggressions that I had experienced.
> Because in general, I am a privileged girl, it's all good. But of course I was happy to find that there were words that expressed how you feel: I have all the resources, I speak German, I know the system, I profit from the system, and still I receive such bullshit sometimes. And well, that was cool to find [these resources] on such an academic level. Of course, that was not new, and I have friends and we talked about such things, but this was like 'Wow, that is exactly what we are always experiencing', and that was especially the ISD, Noah Sow in particular.

Aminata explains above how important it was to see some of her experiences reflected in books by Afro-German authors, and she makes the link between class and race. She highlights a contradiction in her experience: Although she has a good and stable position in German society, she is still subject to racism – that creates an irritation. She believed that somehow class should erase race but found out that this was not the case. And in the books and people she mentioned, Aminata found answers to that felt disjunction between class privilege and racial discrimination – from people who write academically about structural racism in Germany and how they experience it too in their everyday, even those who are academics or have German nationality. It gave Aminata the confidence to feel she had the right to talk about her own experiences of racism despite speaking from a privileged class position. Reading these people that Aminata could identify with on many levels was important, and that they were recognised authors and scholars gave their words a validity that she did not get from the everyday conversations with friends.

In our conversations, Aminata often tried to explain the complexity of her racialised subject position and how these experiences did not directly affect her middle-class status and life in Frankfurt. She tried to foreground the fact that her social, cultural and economic positions were protecting her against some of the negative effects of racism but that she was nonetheless experiencing it and was worried for her children who have already been exposed to racialisation, too. It weighs on her psychologically that her children are going to be exposed to racism in their home country:

> I'm also 35 now, I think it has a lot to do with age and maturity, maturity may be the wrong word, but I believe that the mechanisms that could limit me because of my skin colour, they don't matter anymore here [in Frankfurt], or they can even be an advantage, because sometimes I can get a job because I'm a PoC [Person of Colour].

This claim that her skin colour can even be an advantage at times is not set in stone, rather it is situated. A few months after our interview, Aminata had an experience where she really felt uncomfortable. It had to do with racist/sexist resentments she was exposed to at a political talk that she was moderating. She did not feel safe there, as she usually does in Frankfurt, and was confronted with people living in an area of town where she knew that many voted for the AFD (*Alternative für Deutschland* – a German far-right party that has gained a lot of followers since the so-called refugee crisis in 2015). On the phone one night she told me about the incident, and I could hear in her voice how thrown she was: 'They really crushed me there. One man called me arrogant,' she recounted, and another interrupted her on stage to tell her that the refugee topic they were discussing was very anti-democratic and that he wanted to talk about the problems they had in Riederwald (a neighbourhood in Frankfurt) and not about other things. The majority in the room was white and male – which is why for her these reactions she received also felt like racism mixed with sexism, although calling a person 'arrogant' or even 'anti-democratic' can be interpreted in terms of social class as well. But merely knowing that she was in a neighbourhood where many people had recently voted for the AFD gave these comments by white men a racist undertone. She did not feel safe there because of her skin colour and also because she was a woman in a room full of men. In Frankfurt she usually does not expose herself to this kind of crowd: 'After experiences like that I really feel I need to do a training, mediation, anti-racism, moderation, something like that. It wouldn't have happened if I was a man.' In general, Aminata believes she is privileged in economic and social terms, but experiences of racism are still painful when they happen to her or to family, friends or colleagues. Racist structures and people still exist and will go on existing; she has just learned how to live with them. But her kids still have to learn that.

Silvia: Does it make a difference being in Frankfurt or being elsewhere when it comes to being vulnerable or facing racism?

Aminata: Well at least I don't let it affect me – of course that doesn't mean that racism has become better but rather that, at the same time, that many people are suffering from it, but I rather see it from the outside. But of course there are a few situations in Frankfurt, for example, when I am on my bike with my kids pedalling around and a guy comes up and says 'You refugees only come for the child allowance' [laughs].

Well, you could feel how the atmosphere was deteriorating [since 2015, when the German government accepted many Syrian refugees and extreme-right parties began to grow in popularity], and Mia [her daughter] is not yet able to deal with that, she is still exposed to child-like patterns of conditioning, she has no power over that; it is a totally different thing.

Silvia: Because you see how she reacts?

Aminata: Rather I see how the world reacts to her, or not. I mean it is not omnipresent, but I certainly see there was already a conflict because of it in kindergarten and, more importantly, I do not see that any of the people working there are able to deal with such complex themes, they are simply not educated for these things...

In the above quote, Aminata recounts an experience of racism which shows the intersection of race and class. When random man on the street shouted at her, in that moment she and her children were painted as 'poor asylum seekers who come only to profit from the system and do nothing', a prejudice against one often finds in right-wing populist discourses. As this is so far from Aminata's lived reality, the commentary even makes her laugh (sarcastically). The anecdote shows the ambivalence of her experiences and how she deals with it. On the one hand, she says that she doesn't let racism bother her, because neither her class nor nationality status is endangered by comments like these, but she still experiences all the stereotypes of racism linked to classism in such random encounters. They do not have a material or a practical effect on her life in Frankfurt, but they do have an emotional/psychological impact and they contribute to cultivating fear for the future, especially for the future of her children.

Aminata feels that although it is true that Frankfurt is a very international city in terms of inhabitants, most of the caregivers her children have had so far, most of whom were white, had not learnt how to deal with conflicts/issues related to racist discrimination.[1] Racism is not a topic that is much discussed in schools generally; it is spoken of when something happens in or outside school but only then. It is not a

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[1]   In Germany, around 30 per cent of children have some sort of migration history (either they are migrants or descendants of migrants) but only an estimated 6–7 per cent of teachers do (Massumi 2014).

subject in education and not discussed as a structural phenomenon that exists in society. So, tools are lacking to teach anti-racism. The history of Nazism, antisemitism and the Shoah are discussed a lot in school, but the racism that exists today and how it works in our society is not a topic. Aminata feels that she often has to step up to educate the teachers about certain issues related to racial discrimination (especially anti-Black racism) and often the reactions from the teachers are very defensive. Since Mia was in Kindergarten it was important for Aminata and her husband to educate their daughter and now also their son in anti-racism, for example by giving her books with kids that look like her and to keep on telling her that it is the kids who have a problem not her if they say something about her hair or her looks. Now that her daughter is almost ten, Aminata seems quite reassured that this anti-racist education is already evincing some positive results: 'When kids ask Mia why she has such curly hair or funny hair structure, or when she sees characters with long straight hair, Mia already says that she is very happy to have her type of hair and that she doesn't envy straight blond hair.' This is something that feels like a victory for Aminata because it was not like that for her as a child. For a long time she envied long straight hair and had to go through years and years of using hair relaxer before getting to know her real curly hair structure as an adult. At least she can prevent this being the case for her children.

Aminata's strategies to counter racism are available to her due to her higher education and the kinds of intellectual resources to which she has access. These social and cultural resources help her understand how racism functions and create opportunities to work with other people against it – to create coalitions. But racism is still part of her everyday, through the experiences her children have at school, the fears she has for them, the experiences of friends, and her work in an anti-racism organisation, where she is confronted with incidences of racism and antisemitism in Germany almost on a daily basis. For Aminata it is particularly important to engage in anti-racism work because she feels she should make use of the knowledge and resources she has access to, something that many People of Colour in Germany do not have, particularly those who do not possess German citizenship or have access to higher education. She feels that as a Person of Colour who enjoys a better socioeconomic, it is her duty to be an example for others – first for her children – and to raise her voice against racism.

This idea of responsibility and leadership taken up by a marginalised/racialised educated middle class has been formulated by Bart Landry and Kris Marsh, two sociologists interested in studying the history of the Black middle class in the USA. They stress the responsibility of leadership among the Black middle class: 'In addition, a minority middle class serves the indispensable role of leadership in the struggle against discrimination and oppression that is often the experience of its members' (2011, p. 374). This position was already put forward by W.E.B. du Bois at the beginning of the twentieth century as a strategy to assure the advancement of African

American people. The idea of middle or upper class as a status that predestines one for a leadership role has travelled the world as part of pan-African movements, and for a politically active person such as Aminata it is also important. This leadership function of young Black people in Germany is reflected by the Black movements and by young popular figures such as Aminata Touré, a German-Malian Green Party politician who was born in 1992 and is one of few politicians of African descent in a state parliament in Germany. One of her many priorities is work related to anti-racism and diversity. This leadership role is also part of the mission statement of ADAN (Afro-German Academic Network, discussed in the Introduction) which has a programme that seeks to spread awareness of successful examples of people with a family history of migration to young people in Germany who come from under-privileged families.

This leadership strategy is seen, on the one hand, as a way to counter racism, but it is also a responsibility that weighs psychologically on people engaged in anti-racism campaigning. People who take on such a leadership role see their burden muiltiply, as many are engaged in activist work on a voluntary basis. It is also a very emotional topic as it affect activists at a very personal level. This makes it more ex-hausting than other forms of activist work, where the involvement might be a bit less personal. As Aminata explained: 'It is not work that I can just switch off when I am at home, it is part of my private and public life as a person of African descent in Germany.'

The eternal guest?

Aminata's father takes a different position on racism. He says that in comparison to the dictatorship he knew in Guinea, he is happy in Germany. His position is that he came to Germany as a guest and was well received. Aminata often told me about discussions she had with her father on the matter of racism, which we can also find in the interview I had with him. Talking about how he arrived in Germany, Lamine Camara explained:

> Well and I have to say I always felt good in Germany, so far! Maybe I am an exception. Many foreigners only complain in Germany, I was never like that [laughs]. Maybe because of my history, I came from a country with no freedom, with terror; for me Germany was like a haven of freedom. I always accepted my life in Germany. I was never the type to complain a lot. I thought my life in Germany was okay, rather good. And Aminata keeps on telling me that, Dad, for us it is different, we were born here. Hostility towards foreigners, she feels differently! And that is normal! For me, I was received in Germany. So I am just grateful.

> Silvia: I find it interesting how you hold such a discussion in your family, be-
> cause yes, Aminata and her brother, they were born here.
> Lamine Camara: They were born here, so they see it differently; then my gen-
> eration, we came as strangers, we were received here.
> Silvia: Yes, but why not, you also did something here, you achieved something.
> Lamine Camara: Sure, sure. My children don't agree with me, they say no.
> [laughs] I can understand them well. They are at home here. I actually am the
> stranger. I mean I have the German passport, but I came as a stranger. I was
> received. My children think differently, and that is normal. Aminata tells me
> that often.

Here, Lamine Camara explains the difference between him and his children and the discussions they have within their family – 'They are at home here. I am actually the stranger.' His experiences of being received in Germany have been positive: He got a scholarship, a host family that was nice and of whom he has fond memories. And although he might also have had experiences of racism or been asked some of the same questions as his daughter, like 'Where are you from?' and 'Why is your German so good?' they do not seem to affect or offend him in the same way as Aminata. While it may be annoying to answer to the same questions again and again after living in Germany for more than forty years, it is also true that he learnt German as a foreign language and was not socialised in Germany like his children. He looks at Germany from an outsider perspective, although his home is Frankfurt, he also has another home in Guinea.

Although, on the one hand, Lamine Camara said that for him Germany was a 'haven of freedom' compared to Guinea, he also mentions right after that that 'he always accepted his life in Germany' and never complained much. This is an interesting way of answering the question of what it was like to come to Germany (I did not ask if he had any negative experiences); there is an underlying feeling that everything was not as easy and smooth as he made it sound in his explanation – to employ the term 'accept' could possibly also refer to negative experiences that a migrant has to cope with in a foreign country. Nevertheless, what Lamine Camara repeats to me is that he did not suffer from racism. For his children it is different. Raised in Germany, feeling it is their home before anywhere else, Aminata is more emotionally involved when she or her kids are made to feel like outsiders in Germany, despite not being that. However, it also has to be taken into account that Lamine Camara took his particular narrative position in a formal interview situation, where the recorder was on the coffee table, and the interview was with me – a white German-French friend of his daughter. Maybe his position and the experiences he would talk about with someone else would have been very different? Lamine Camara also cultivates a hope that his grandchildren will not have to deal with racism anymore, and until then his strategy is to educate his children to 'be strong' and 'fight'. I read Lamine

Camara's answer as a statement that racism does indeed exist, but that you should not let yourself be crushed by it and use your potential to confront it, a position that is not necessarily attached to a class status but more to the experience of being read as an outsider in German society. As he continued:

> Yes, it's coming, it's coming. That will be standard in Germany, that all Germans are not blond. Not blue eyed, and when that happens Aminata's children or grandchildren will not be asked that anymore [asked *Where are you from?*]. I always tell Aminata, you have to educate your children to be strong. Not grumbling. Life is a fight, you have to fight, you don't get anything for free. You never know maybe the blond Germans also have problems?

In the quote above he explains how he educated his children about certain problems in society. Maybe racism exists, but people also face other problems, as the last question he poses suggests: *Maybe the blond Germans also have problems?* His stance towards racism is 'Don't take it too seriously and concentrate on getting further with your life.'

Lamine Camara was able to come to Germany and get a scholarship, yet assuring his status had not been without obstacles. Once he graduated as one of the best of his class and wanted to continue education at a doctoral level, things got more complicated. He reached a glass ceiling. His scholarship programme declined to continue his funding as it had been assumed that Lamine Camara was going to go back to Guinea after studying. The scholarship programme was not meant to bring African students to Germany forever (neither were the guest worker contracts): The idea of the scholarship programs was to offer an education so that the students could go back to their countries of origin and spread a positive picture of Germany as a generous friend. Fortunately, Germany was not able to control the destinies of all of the students, and Lamine Camara decided to stay, even if it meant he had to stop studying. He knows what it means to fight for his rights and to make concessions. Towards the very end of our interview – I had actually already switched the recording device off and had to put it on again – we talked again about politics, racism and taking a stand against racism, and here Lamine spoke a bit more about the differences between himself and his generation and that of his daughter:

> Lamine Camara: I have to think, when was I a victim of racism? I wouldn't know where? I read about it, 'foreigners attacked here', it never happened to me.
> Silvia: Yes but in the 1990s, for example, there was also a wave of attacks.
> Lamine Camara: In Frankfurt it never happened to me. I read about it in eastern Germany ok, but not here. I was never part of it.
> Silvia: You don't have to be attacked physically for it to be racism – Aminata, for instance, although she was born here like me, my mother is from France, so I

am as much a child of immigration as she is, but random people ask her where she is from. That is a subtle form of racism.

Lamine Camara: Yes, Aminata always tells me 'Dad, I understand you but we don't have the same problems.' That's normal. […] My generation, we have almost been programmed – we are guests in Germany. But Aminata is not a guest, that is the difference.

What is interesting to note is also my personal stance and reaction to his comments. I step out of the role of 'objective interviewer' and instead challenge him with a different position, the one that I also know from his daughter, which is that racism exists and is a problem everywhere. Our conversation becomes a brief political debate. One of Lamine Camara's strategies seems to be to acknowledge racism in Germany but to situate it in eastern Germany, a strategy used not only by Lamine Camara but by most people in the country – an assumption that relies on the history of rising neo-Nazism in eastern German states after the unification of the 1990s and associated neo-Nazi violence. The assumption is often that, yes, racism exists but only in the former GDR and only by neo-Nazis and not as part of a larger everyday phenomenon. Lamine Camara envisions Frankfurt as a safe space for him. This is the place he can be and feel at home. His daughter does the same. She often said that she was always happy to come back to Frankfurt where she was able to create her 'bubble' where she could feel at ease. This is problematic considering that it means that in other places in Germany, with the exception of big cities, she does not feel at ease. There is always a lingering danger of being affected by experiences of racialisation or racism. This fear has a considerable impact on travel decisions within Germany: former GDR states are consciously avoided. When Aminata had to travel to Leipzig for work, a city in the state of Saxony, she was not looking forward to the trip like she usually does. She was afraid of how people would treat her and look at her, thinking whether she would be one of the few Black people around. Nothing bad happened to her there, but she also did not feel she could move in public space in the way she is used to in Frankfurt. Lamine Camara acknowledges and understands the different position his daughter holds towards racism, and explains the differences by saying that he belongs to another generation. By saying 'we have almost been programmed' he is explaining how he learned to deal with an outsider position in Germany.

Lamine Camara learned to accept his condition as an 'eternal guest', much like the so-called guest-worker generation – labour migrants from Turkey, Morocco, and other countries from the 1970s – with the major difference being his educational achievements and the middle-class job he was able to get as a result. In class terms, he achieved a good standard of living, did not face deskilling and secured German citizenship. In 2018, the journalist Can Merey, son of a Turkish migrant, published a book called *The Eternal Guest: How My Turkish Father Tried to Become German* (*Der ewige Gast. Wie mein türkischer Vater versuchte, Deutscher zu werden*). The book is based on in-

terviews Merey held with his father, sixty years after the latter immigrated to Germany.

And the conclusion it draws is not promising. Although his father came as a highly educated man willing to learn everything about Germany, quickly acquiring the language, marrying a woman from Bavaria, working as a manager in a big company, taking German citizenship and speaking only German in the family, Merey's father Tosun feels he was not accepted as a 'real' German. He compares this to the case of his sister, who migrated to the USA and was soon to feel like an American (no matter how many languages they spoke at home). On the other hand, looking at his story from the perspective of class mobility, his migration to Germany did not harm his upper-class status, and his today son uses his resources and position as a journalist to write about Germany's flaws when it comes to the normalisation of racialised othering. Like Aminata, Can Merey, the son of a Turkish immigrant and German mother, assumes a leadership function as a marginalised and ethnicised member of the middle-class who wants to contribute to debates about integration and difference. The idea of Germany and Germans as a 'community of descent' (Brubaker 1994, p. 14) is a very enduring one and still engrained in the ethnonational myth of the country; it is linked to an ideal of whiteness, an ideology that makes it impossible for People of Colour to claim Germanness. People of Colour who are active in politics and especially the media try to counter the stereotypical picture of 'the German' as white, blond and blue eyed by including a new vocabulary in their discourse. Many new terms were created by People of Colour in Germany, such as 'New Germans', as in the *Neue deutschen Medienmacher* (New German Media-Makers),[2] an organisation of journalists who are all also People of Colour. The aim is to point out that Germany is changing and that over time people with origins all over the world have come to live in Germany, and have often been here already for more than one generation. They should be accepted as Germans without the need for the suffix 'with migration background'.

When talking about the recent rise of the extreme right in Germany, unlike myself or Aminata, Lamine Camara is not so worried. After I informed him that I was concerned about what could happen if the AFD kept growing in strength, Lamine Camara explained his own position. When he arrived in Germany in the 1970s, they were afraid of the CDU – the centre-right party – which espoused the same anti-immigration discourse as the AFD today:

> As a young student we were afraid in Germany of the CDU [the centre right Christian Democratic Union]. Like the AFD, it was racist and xenophobic. People were afraid that if the CDU got into power, all the foreigners would have

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2   The organisation's website is: https://www.neuemedienmacher.de/ (accessed 5 October 2020).

to go. When Kohl came (after 13 years of social-democratic governments, Helmut Kohl became chancellor in 1982, remaining until 1998), the CDU couldn't hold an event in Frankfurt without police protection. People were afraid, if they came to power, it would be over. Really? Yes! But once in power its different, like for the Green Party. When the Green Party was able to govern, at first they came to parliament in trainers. The capital doesn't accept that. The political and state institutions are very strong in Germany. A country with strong institutions is difficult to govern by extremists. Justice is independent. The extremists have to adapt. Civil society is strong. If they want all foreigners out they first have to define what a foreigner is! […] I think in Germany, extremists can come into power, but they can't govern with extremism. These times are over, not only in Germany, but France, Austria. You can forbid the veil, but you can't forbid religion, how would you? Sometime there is a red line, and then it stops.

Lamine Camara has already lived through many political changes since he has been in Germany and it seems his confidence in the constitutional state is strong. Hearing him talk about his political opinions, I wished I had his trust in the political system. As he has lived in Germany for more than forty years, he has seen how the country has changed politically, how immigration discourses that used to be typical of the centre right now belong to the far right, which for him is a positive development. It means that mainstream politics has developed a more liberal position towards migration and abandoned racist underpinnings to the far right. Talking about his daughter, I could feel he was proud of her political engagement and her engagement in the African diaspora.

Two generations, two experiences of Germany

In an interview with left-wing daily newspaper *Taz*, the political scientist Ozan Zakariya Keskinkılıç talks about the experience of everyday racism for a Person of Colour – himself being of Turkish descent, born and raised in Germany but always also perceived as different and never belonging because of his family's migration history:

> My parents love nature. They have sheep, chickens, a little vegetable garden. That was nice. My childhood was not a horror movie. But racism exists exactly in this ambiguity, and you live in the middle of it. On the one hand you have a totally normal life and on the other hand you don't! You have to learn to live with this discrepancy that most people will never be confronted with. […] It took a long time for me to understand that the problem was not me but how other people think and talk about me. (Memarnia 2020)[3]

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3   '*Meine Eltern lieben die Natur. Sie haben Schafe, Hühner, einen kleinen Gemüsegarten. Das war auch schön. Meine Kindheit auf dem Land war kein Horrormovie. Aber Rassismus existiert genau in dieser*

As a child and teenager, Aminata did not know how to address many of her experiences of racism/racialisation or being migrantised. She underlines the importance of representation. Reading about her feelings and experiences of racism/racialisation in a society like Germany as a person of African descent was powerful. By reading Afro-German authors on issues such as racism in Germany and their personal experiences and analyses, Aminata was able to generalise from her own experiences and understand them as part of a history of structural racism against people of African descent. Her own encounters with racism were no longer just personal: They became embedded in a system where she was not alone. Furthermore, reading other people who write about it on an intellectual level was an 'empowering experience'. Her subjective experiences were objectified to a certain extent; they began to make sense as a structural relation within society, because they were confirmed by others – they were intersubjective.

Ethnographic works engaging with the analysis of race and class have tended to focus on migration and the development of ethnicised and racialised proletarisation. For example, the sociologist W.E.B. du Bois, who wrote on the racialised Black proletariat in the American South (1903), Abdelmalek Sayad, who worked on Algerian migration and the experience of racism and classism in France (1979), or Loïc Wacquant and John Howe's study on the production of the urban poor and ghettoisation in Paris and Chicago (2008). These are all works that have shown the intersection of class with ethnicity/race. My own work focuses on the formation of racialised middle classes in Germany. Growing up in Germany, Aminata often felt like she stood out with her darker skin tone and curly hair. But socially, culturally and intellectually, she had the means to deal with racialisation – the tools to confront her own experiences analytically. That influenced the development of a particular political African diaspora consciousness that was influenced by the idea of a shared condition of being racialised as person of African descent.

Aminata's work in anti-racism networks is part of the responsibility she feels she has towards all People of Colour in Germany. She believes that her middle-class economic and social position in comparison to other Black people and People of Colour make it her duty to engage politically. Her father, Lamine Camara, grew up in very different surroundings, and did not have to deal with othering and being racialised in his home country of Guinea. Othering does not have the same effect on him, as he has recourse to another socialisation. But both feel, albeit to different extents, that

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Doppeldeutigkeit, du selbst lebst darin. Einerseits hast du ein stinknormales Leben und andererseits eben nicht! Du musst lernen, mit dieser Diskrepanz umzugehen, mit der andere niemals konfrontiert sind. […] Es hat lange gedauert, bis ich verstanden habe, dass nicht ich das Problem bin, sondern, wie andere über mich denken und sprechen'. https://taz.de/Ueber-alltaeglichen-Rassismus/!5676807/ (accessed 30. April 2024).

their educated middle-class status grants them some freedom from racism in Germany – their access to German nationality, their knowledge of the educational and social systems is more important for their ability to navigate their everyday lives. Nonetheless, Aminata cannot deny that, at the same time, racism and especially the fear of having to deal with it again in the third generation, as grandchildren of a migrant, weighs on her psychologically and animates her to be active in political work.

Conclusion to Part I

In the four chapters that form Part I 'Diasporic Generations', I examine the importance that one's generation plays in the process of coming of age as a person of African descent in Germany.

What does it mean to migrate to, live in or grow up in Germany as a racialised person in different times? Part I has examined various modalities in the history of migration and diaspora. Large numbers of Africans first came to Germany during the colonial period; the historical and practical circumstances meant that becoming politically active at that time was a very different matter for a person of African descent compared to today – but Afrodiasporic political organisations nonetheless emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with an early pan-African and socialist/communist paradigm inspired by the movements of their times. How forms of political engagement have changed and developed in line with macro- and particularly micro-circumstances is taken up in the ethnographic chapters following the life of Lamine Camara and his daughter Aminata and two of her peers in Germany since the 1970s, a time when the country was strongly influenced by the US Civil Rights movement, had its own 1968 revolution, and when many African students came from recently decolonised countries. I interrogate how issues of class and race affect different generations who grew up in very different historical contexts in Germany. One thing that is true of racism in every historical period is that it was always resisted by those affected: From the 1880s to today, there have been political and community organisations who resisted discrimination and fought for their rights by building coalitions.

Another aspect that I focus on in Part I is the importance of the local level for forming diasporic identities and for diasporic practice. Nassy Brown (2005) has stressed the importance of focusing on the role of local places in the forging of Black identities, taking the example of Liverpool. My work takes the experiences of Aminata, her friend Maya and Lafia at its core and shows how growing up in Frankfurt influenced their lives in broadly similar ways. The lives of Maya, Lafia and Aminata demonstrate what Robert Smith has claimed for his ethnography of Mexican-American families: that 'forms of transnational involvement change with the life course, attenuating and intensifying at different stages' (2006, p. 205). Their

diasporic attachments were first of all dependent on their family networks. Having grown up with their West African fathers, Maya and Aminata had a binational self-understanding (as Sierra Leonean-German and Guinean-German, respectively) very early on. West African cultural practice and kin was included in their everyday life, whereas Lafia grew up more distanced from her Senegalese father, in a white liberal milieu; she started to deal more with her Senegalese origins as an adult, sensitised through her psychoanalytical study and work environment. What mattered locally and historically for Maya and Lafia, especially for relating to Blackness as teenagers, was the presence of Black American culture and GI entertainment infrastructures that were of particular importance in forging a positive racialised and gendered self-understanding in their teens.

How race and class intersect is subject to change and depends on historical circumstances, such as transformations in the forms of racism. The first Africans in Germany came when scientific racism was flourishing throughout Europe and the USA at the end of the nineteenth century (Wieviorka 1998). Race theories were produced in order to justify the domination and exploitation of one group by another. The spread of scientific racism, which taught that biological features had a direct impact on psychological characteristics, had a direct impact on how Afrodescendant people were received in Germany, on their rights and on the dangers they faced (including even the possibility of sterilisation after 1933) (Aitken & Rosenhaft 2013, Michael 2015). As the biologistic paradigm lost its scientific validity following World War II, racism changed, and so did the social and economic possibilities for Afrodescendant people in Germany. Downward mobility and open racist discrimination was less of an issue for African migrant students who arrived in Germany from the 1950s onwards. Scientific racism had been proven wrong and Germany needed to rebuild itself after the horrors of the Nazi regime. East Germany included anti-racism in its constitution, and West Germany wanted to build an open and tolerant nation. Racism was by no means gone, but it was not as accepted as before and was stripped of its biologistic base.

Instead, racism was now defined in terms of culture, and differences between white Germans and People of Colour were constructed in terms of an essentialising view of culture and the supposed impossibility that non-white foreigners could integrate successfully due to differences in culture – a phenomenon called cultural or differentialist racism (Taguieff 1985, Balibar & Wallerstein 1991, Fassin & Fassin 2009). The case of Lamine Camara shows how he was able to ensure middle-class status for himself and his family, but not without facing certain constraints as a Guinean migrant. He did not suffer downward mobility, but nor was he able to achieve the level he strived for, which was to access education up to doctorate level.

Aminata faces different problems related to racism and racialisation, the most persistent being the *migrantisation* of Black people and People of Colour in Germany, regardless of how long they or their families have lived there. This process links racial

with classist othering: People who are of non-European descent are not only constructed as eternal newcomers but are also automatically associated with the working class and all the stereotypes attached to it.

Discrimination based on physical features lingers on, and having a darker skin tone and curly hair continues to be an excuse for othering and exoticising. But Aminata does not feel that these experiences have harmed her economic or social opportunities. She sees a strong intersection of racism and classism affecting working class People of Colour and recently migrated non-white people. But she recognises that this does not significantly affect her material conditions; she and her family are well off today in socioeconomic terms and in comparison with the wider international situation. In terms of personal experience, racism has affected her family: her husband has had experiences of being discriminated against at his job and their children have already experienced racist discrimination at school. These are experiences that weigh psychologically and induce fear of possible status loss as racialised middle class.

Another phenomenon that Part I of this book sheds light on is diasporic identities across family generations. Whereas attachment to the homeland remains strong for a primomigrant like Lamine Camara, whose high level of education and political awareness led him into Guinean politics from the diaspora, the situation is different for his children. Aminata's Afrodiasporic identity and practice is very much influenced by her being a millennial – the generation who grew up as the first digital natives – and she takes her influences from all over the world, although her generation in Germany is still very much influenced by Black culture from the USA. For Aminata, although Guinea interests her because the knows that her father grew up there and she even lived there too, this diasporic attachment is not the most important factor in her diasporic practice, which has become multicentred and reaches from Germany and France, via the USA to West Africa. Aminata's relationship to her Afrodescendant heritage has been a process – a process of building a positive racial(ised) identity as Black: associating with Black American culture, finding community with other young people of African descent in Germany to fight racist stigma, becoming active herself in Black German and anti-racist activism, and then identifying more and more as West African as an adult woman with a family of her own. Today she is also practising what Herbert Gans called 'symbolic ethnicity' (Gans 1979). He defined this as 'a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior' (1979, p. 9). It is an identification which is taken up at specific moments in life, for festivities (celebrating Christmas with German and West African dishes) and such like. But it can also be incorporated in everyday behaviour by, for example, wearing African garments or earrings in the shape of the African continent.

A crucial factor in the desire to (re)connect – or not – with a place of ancestral origin is the relationship with family. This is a part of the story that will be continued in the following chapters.

Part II: Diasporic Travel

Germany has shaped by various African diaspora movements since the 1880s. Part I explored the histories and conditions of African migration to Germany. The trajectories of Aminata, her friends and her father showed how time and place matter for forging racialised and classed identities and how diaspora is practised across generations. Part I examined the emergence of different generational consciousnesses and how the perception of race, class and belonging can differ not only within a family but also among people of the same age. It showed the importance that both local place and the digital world play in the construction of multicentred Afrodiasporic identities. In Part II, the focus is on travel in the making of diasporic identities. It will shift away from the local and national scales to highlight the importance of transnational relations, especially transnational family relations. Although many reference points today exist that allow one to construct a positive sense of one's own African heritage as European, or German,[1] the practice of travelling to connect and experience African heritage remains important, as Germany still affords few possibilities in that regard. Travelling offers the chance to engage with a place and its people with all one's senses and feelings. This lived experience of travelling helps to embody an identity, to make it part of one's bodily memories.

In Chapters 6, 7 and 8, we follow the 'Diasporic Travels' of Maya, Lafia and Aminata, which I place in the context of their life stories. I examine how my interlocutors use their travel experiences to connect with a (sometimes unknown) family history and how the travel experience also fuels their self-perceptions as Germans of African descent. We will reconnect with Maya and follow her from Paris to London and Nigeria, where she lived in 2018/19. But why Nigeria if her father is from Sierra Leone? Then, we will also meet Lafia again and will get to know about her first journey to her father's homeland of Senegal. Why did it take her more than thirty years to get there? And last but not least, we will continue to follow Aminata as she travels to Ghana, now that she has founded a family of her own and is in her mid-thirties.

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1   For example, via digital media such as *Okay Africa* or the German YouTube channel *Ah Nice*, which Maya showed me. *Ah Nice* is the creation of a young Afrodescendant German from North Rhine Westphalia and can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCS009 hEzbzWL3lMO2KXD_NA (accessed 8 September 2020).

Thus, her wish to connect with a West African heritage materialises and opens up new ways of understanding herself and her Ghanaian kin.

In this part I ask: What is the role of travelling in the construction of diasporic identities? What are the women searching for through their travels, what do they find, and finally, what limits are reached through these travels?

First, I will introduce Maya in Chapter 6. We will follow Maya's life and travels and, in particular, how the journeys she made at first in Europe and later in Nigeria contributed to her coming of age as a Black and Afrodescendant person. Since Maya's father's family moved away when she was 17 (she stayed in Frankfurt), Maya was trying to find ways to reunite more often with her family and to nurture her 'African side'. Travelling has been one way to do that. Then we will join Lafia in Chapter 7. In contrast to Maya, Lafia grew up more with her German mother and was rather distant from her Senegalese origins while growing up. She made her first trip to Senegal a few years ago, in her early thirties. Aminata's Guinean heritage has always been a normal part of her life, and Guinea was neither strange nor foreign. Yet she had not lived there since childhood and had not had much contact with her West African origins since her teens, and it grew in importance once she was an adult, and especially since she had children of her own. As her husband is German-Ghanaian, they travelled to Ghana as a family, which was her first time in West Africa as an adult woman and more importantly as a mother. This journey will be explored in Chapter 8. Maya's case introduces us to the possibility of travel as 'imagined returns to the homeland through memory, cultural rediscovery, and longing', as Levitt and Waters (2006, p. 24) describe it with regard to transnational practices of members of the second generation in the USA. In Lafia's case, I demonstrate how dealing with a country of parental origin – and roots travel as part of that – is closely related to one's personal life-course and relationship to one's parents. I analyse Aminata's case in Ghana using the concept of the 'status paradox': She experienced a change of socioeconomic and cultural positions during the trip that she subsequently reflects upon. The status paradox has been defined, among others, by Boris Nieswand (2012), who investigates the shift of social and economic positions that transnational Ghanaian migrants experience in the countries they emigrate to and in their places of origin and how they handle this contradiction. In Aminata's case, the status paradox plays out in a different way and has an effect on how she negotiates family and care during the trip itself. For all three women, dealing with their West African origins is part of the process of coming of age as a German of African descent; dealing with family history is seen as a way to become a 'real adult'.

6. Maya B.: Building Afrodiasporic identity through travel

Many things that were once familiar to Maya as a result of her growing up in a Sierra Leonean family are no longer part of her life in Germany since her father, brother, stepmother and stepsiblings moved to the USA when she was 17. Although she tries to connect to African colleagues at work, feeling connected to her West African heritage remains difficult in Frankfurt, a city that – although very international (almost 50 per cent of the population have a foreign passport) – is not very much influenced by immigration from African countries.

In this chapter, I consider the role that travel to various destinations at different times has had for Maya's practice and understanding of diasporic identity: a trip to Paris where she 'discovered' what it meant to be part of larger Black communities; a trip to London as an adult and a trip to Nigeria, where she moved for a job in 2018; finally, a trip that also gave her the opportunity to visit Sierra Leone again. During her European travels, it was the chance to encounter many Afrodescendant people of a similar age and urban upbringing, in particular, which created points of identification and fed into her construction of an Afro-European identity. Nigeria was important to connect to her personal biography and family – though not the country of Maya's ancestral origin, it combines life in a West African country with the opportunity to have a European standard of middle-class life. Her visit to Sierra Leone shows that, as a member of the second generation born and raised in Germany, she is still seen as an important transnational link for her family in Sierra Leone, despite the fact that she is not a primomigrant.

Travelling in Afroeurope

Remembering Paris 1999 as a Teenager – Kitchen talk (2) Sitting in my kitchen in Frankfurt

While we talk about famous Nigerian music and collaborations between Nigeria and the UK, I ask Maya if she knows the online documentary series

Strolling, where Cecile Emeke creates portraits of young Afro-Europeans and Afrodiasporic adults from the USA and Jamaica. She doesn't, and I show her an episode that I like about two French Afrodescendant women in Paris. The two women talk about French beauty ideals and how they felt they did not correspond to them and how Black communities were organised or not organised in Paris. In particular, they said that Black men often wanted to be with women of a lighter skin complexion. 'It is as if it would be seen as incestuous when a Black man dates a Black woman', the one complains, 'But if no one in your community stands up for you, who else will?' While we watch it, Maya agrees and says that she knows that kind of behaviour especially from older Black men, for whom it is somehow important to date women with a lighter skin tone. She has often been fetishised because she has light skin. And she concludes: 'Oh, how nice it would be to just have coffee with these two now!' We go on watching the episode. It almost feels as if a dialogue has been established between her and the French women. The two Parisians go on talking about how they feel that there is no real solidarity among Black people in Paris. 'We see Black people in the streets every day, but there is no sense of community', one regrets. Yet here Maya begs to differ: 'That was not my feeling when we were doing the student exchange in Paris.' Back in school we participated in a student exchange, and her exchange partner was a French Afro-Caribbean girl. 'They took me everywhere, even to other African and Caribbean families'. Maya felt that Black communities were much more visible to each other in Paris. 'And is that different in Germany? You said once that you felt that African communities here were organised around nations, right?' I asked her. 'Yes, in Germany communities are quite separate. Although my father always helped people from different African communities. But actually Sierra Leone only had closer links with Gambia here, no idea why. My impression was that in Paris the communities were much closer. Here a Caribbean store, there an African one, and everywhere people greeted you nicely.' This short time in Paris is held dear in Maya's memory. (Fieldnote, 10 October 2017)

Maya often mentions Paris when talking about Afrodiasporic communities in Europe. We went there together during a student exchange when we were 15 years old. Since then, she has visited Paris on a few occasions. and it has become one of her favourite destinations in Europe.

I, too, vividly remember the student exchange to Paris that Aminata, Maya and I participated in. It must have been around 1999. Whereas all of us had very different experiences during those two weeks because of our different guest families, we could share them when we got together in Paris and afterwards. Maya went into a French family of Afro-Caribbean descent and got along brilliantly with her guest sister, who introduced her to the world of 'Parisian Caribbean-ness'. I remember seeing her only rarely outside of the regular school programme, because she was always hanging out with her guest sister and their friends. She was introduced to members

of Saïan Supa Crew, a top French hip hop band, and to Raggasonic, another French hip hopper, both of whom are very influenced by African/African diaspora music and are themselves of varied African descent.

While in Frankfurt for fieldwork in December 2017, I was going through my stuff at my parents place in Frankfurt when I found a report which our class had to write about this trip to Paris, and I spotted this piece that Maya wrote:

It is part of a school class report where everyone had to write a page about a special experience they had had during the trip to Paris. Maya chose to write about dinner customs in France and of her host family. Towards the end of the small report she writes:

> Dinner plays an important role for French society. [...] It was like that when I was in France. The family was always invited to friends to eat together. That is how I got to know a lot of very nice and friendly people. In addition, it was always a family where the father or the mother had Caribbean origins. That is why they were often very interested in the culture of my father and in my origins, because Caribbean and Sierra Leonean culture have much in common. I really enjoyed my stay in Paris. (Maya, Paris report, 1999)

In Paris, Maya experienced family on multiple dimensions. It was an opportunity for her to get to know French Caribbean culture in the intimate setting of a family home, where she was welcomed as guest-daughter/sister. She was also able to share her own diasporic Sierra Leonen-German family culture with them. And she experienced family on another level while hanging out with people of African descent of her own age group. She was immersed for the first time in something she would call a 'Black community'. Remembering her time in Paris hanging out with her exchange partner and their friends she told me during a conversation we had during another trip:

> And they took such good care of me, well of course, in part because I was really young, but still, when someone talked to me, they were directly there, next to me, telling the person to leave their '*petite soeur*' [little sister] alone. There was not a single second that I felt uncomfortable. I felt really well looked after. (Conversation in London, 2017)

In the quotation above, Maya refers to her guest sister and their friends. They took her out sometimes with bigger groups of friends and the fact that they would refer to her as 'little sister' moved her and made her feel welcome. In that moment in Paris, the 'little sister' was more than a metaphor, she was almost adopted by another family for a while and treated as a family member. In Paris she got to know African diasporic life with peers, young Afrodescendant people growing up together in a European city. In Frankfurt, these opportunities were rather rare. Although it is a very

international city, many of whose inhabitants have an international migration history (see Chapter 3), African influences are rather scarce in comparison to European centres with more African migration, such as Paris or London. In Frankfurt, Maya's relationship to her African heritage was predominantly shaped by her father, who was a very active member of the Sierra Leonean community.

In Frankfurt, Maya was able to practise her African-ness as a form of diasporic belonging directed towards the origins of her father within the confines of a small African community. But in Paris she was able to practise diasporic belonging with a more multipolar vision of African-ness as community of people with varied African and Afro-Caribbean descent sharing the same age, class and urban upbringing. This experience was renewed as an adult when we went to London together in 2017.

London 2017 – Relating to Afrodiasporic subculture in Europe as an adult

I travelled to London with Maya and Otis (her husband) in November 2017, to celebrate Maya's birthday and to visit Clara, an old friend from Frankfurt. On several occasions during our journey, Maya and Otis felt a intimate connection to the diverse Afrodiasporic cultures, especially the youth culture they encountered there. Otis is from Frankfurt and has a German mother and an African American father who came to Germany as a GI but moved back to the USA when Otis was still small. And for many years he grew up with a stepfather from Ghana. Our itinerary in London was a mix of strolling around in Brixton, visiting Tate Modern, doing a Black heritage tour in Notting Hill and having a traditional high tea.

> Strolling in London Day 1
>
> On our first day, Otis is yet to arrive, we get off at Brixton station and wander around without any particular direction and arrive at a market. When Maya sees the stands with plantains and yams she says 'I would so open a restaurant here.' We stop in front of a Jamaican restaurant and agree that we will have to come back with Otis to eat chicken. Upon walking through an indoor market hall with a variety of African and Caribbean stalls, listening to the sounds of Reggae music, Maya tells me that usually she always feels best in the neighbourhoods where many immigrants live. It feels good to see the diversity of a city. The number of African influences compared to Frankfurt seems incredible. Besides the occasional Afroshop close to the main station in Frankfurt, there are only a few African businesses in the city, as the largest migrant communities are from Turkey or the former Yugoslavia. Here in London, one can directly feel that migration from African and Caribbean countries is bigger. There is also a shop that says 'Sierra Leone Groceries' and Maya is curious. She glance inside but as she does not see any familiar products, and the tenants look Indian or Pakistani, so we do not go in.

Figure 5: Brixton Market 2017, Photos by the author

Day 5

We were just finishing our lunch at Zoe's Kitchen, a small, hip Ghanaian restaurant at an indoor market in Brixton, and Maya and I are waiting outside for Otis. We talk about the day before, when we went to a 'roundhouse event', a music and performance event for young artists and bands. Among other things there was a youth band from the Notting Hill carnival, the biggest Caribbean carnival in Europe.

Maya: You begin to wonder how you would have turned out if you had grown up here. If you had discovered things more early, or your talents, in music, for example.

Silvia: And what do you think?

Maya: I believe it would have been easier for me to indulge in certain things. I think I would have made music. Something like Carnival music. And maybe, well, maybe the connections, maybe I would have studied creole languages or something like that. (Fieldnote, November 2017)

Simply because it seemed more part of everyday normality – this mix of Afrodiasporic cultures – Maya felt that life for her as an Afrodescendant person could have been different, as she would have been able to connect on diverse levels to the heritage that she wanted to practise.

What became evident during our trip was the link between travel experiences and personal biography. The places a person goes to and the people they meet are always set in relation to their own system of reference. Getting to know other Afroeuropean cultures and subcultures (music scenes, for example) in London made Maya re-evaluate her life and upbringing in Germany, and to reconsider other experiences she had had while travelling.

Being in London also caused her to reflect again on her time in Paris, where she had perceived a very different mix of Afrodescendant cultures and subcultures. As an adult, what struck her most was how many Black-owned businesses she saw:

> Maya: I already had that [feeling] in Paris. This feeling 'Oh how great, such a big community, this mix of Caribbeans and Africans, and still so many things in common', that made me think 'Oh my god, we have nothing [in Frankfurt]'.
> Silvia: Nothing? Because it is so different in Frankfurt?
> Maya: Yes, just seeing that so many [Black] people are entrepreneurs here. Maybe it would have given me the courage to also be one. I mean, it's all good really, but you start to question that. [...] because you have so few contact points for Black identity, and when you do not even grow up in a big city than it really is a problem, especially for young boys. And it is different, it feels different, as Otis explained to you earlier.

Otis had talked about how it felt to be in a city with so many 'allies' (by which he meant other young Black people), in a place where you do not feel you are one of only a few dark-skinned people – and also the fact that there are many young Black people that you potentially have a lot in common with, with whom you can identify, compare hair styles, looks, music tastes. It is a lot about identifying with people your age and milieu. Otis was often stunned at the variety of hairstyles, for instance. He said that he would love to try the short braids, but at his job, that would not be appropriate – he works in the finance sector of a development cooperation organisation. Experiencing other Black youth subcultures in London created points of identification for both Otis and Maya, of positively identifying as Afrodiasporic people in Europe and feeling connected.

Exploring Afrodiasporic culture in Europe while travelling has been important to Maya ever since, and in that regard Paris and London have impressed her most. But much like in Aminata's case, her personal connection to West Africa has also become more important as an adult, and since she was in her mid-twenties the idea of living and working there has grown stronger. In her case this is also catalysed by the fact that her father has moved back to Sierra Leone, and the idea of living close to him has been with her for some years now.

Imagining Nigeria 2018

The anthropologist Frances Pine (2014) describes how futures are imagined through reference to certain pasts. Maya's memories of life in Sierra Leone, transmitted to her by her father, as well as, to a certain extent, the memories of her own travel to Sierra Leone as a child, coalesce as she imagines her own and her family's future.

Although Maya fully appreciates the security, freedom and range of possibilities of her life in Germany and with a German passport, she does not imagine her future as being located only there. Maya decided to engage in transnational mobility; although she is a person who can be perceived as 'solidly established in a territory' (de Gourcy 2019, p. 1) in Germany, where she was born and raised, it is a voluntary mobility. Her wish is to create a transnational life between West Africa and Europe not only for herself but also for her child (after a few months in Nigeria she became pregnant); it is important on the level of cultural experience and transmission and is facilitated by her German middle-class status, which provides her with economic resources and means that she encounters few legal barriers. In many ways, Maya and her husband are privileged and engage in privileged forms of living and travel, and they are aware of that. Not only do they belong to a highly educated middle class, but to a middle class from a rich country in the Global North. Nevertheless, at times their lives feel uncertain. They always had to work a lot in Germany in order to maintain their middle-class status and support their families, and Maya often feels lonely because part of her family is far away. Neither of them is from the upper middle class, and they have achieved some upward class mobility in comparison to their parents through higher education. The anthropologists Barbara Ehrenreich (1989) and Hadas Weiss (2019) describe this uncertainty and fear of losing one's status while aspiring towards upward social mobility as a defining characteristic of being middle class. Maya and Otis want to stabilise their class position, first by engaging in a transnational mobility, which could benefit their careers, and second by transmitting their intercultural background to their child who can potentially use it to strengthen their social position in the future.

The entanglement of physical mobility with social class mobility

All of Maya's higher education and professional choices have been directed towards the possibility of working either in the tourism industry or in urban development in countries of the Global South – in her case preferably a West African country. Maya has a BA in tourism studies from Cologne and a Master's in urban planning and development with a focus on the Global South.

In 2018, Maya and Otis got the opportunity to relocate to Nigeria to work. They both worked in a big development cooperation agency for a while and were looking out for opportunities to go to Nigeria. While Nigeria is not Sierra Leone, it is close,

and in terms of living standards is a wealthier country with more possibilities for people who are used to a comfortable European lifestyle. Nigeria offers Maya and her partner Otis more opportunities work-wise than any other country in the region, and it is an expat hub. Because Sierra Leone is the country of origin of Maya's father, one would think it the most logical destination, based on the wish to reconnect to family origins. While this is indeed the case in theory for Maya, Sierra Leone did not fit her professional or educational goals, or her European middle-class standard of living, which she feared would be difficult to keep up, especially in terms of healthcare and security. Sierra Leone had not long emerged from civil war (2002) and faced a grave Ebola crisis in 2014, and although her father was living there with his family not far from the capital, Freetown, Maya was not sure about the risks of living there. The security factor became even more important because she wanted to have children soon. Moreover, although her husband was generally open to living somewhere else at least for a while, it was important that he have good job prospects too. The connection to Sierra Leone is still significant for Maya, but she defines 'origins' in a broader sense. For her, origins go beyond a specific national context and come to include broader cultural practices, which she attaches more in general to West African countries.

Maya chose to engage in mobility, and her economic status and nationality allowed her to create a range of options of where to go. Nigeria was in fact her first choice, because it is economically stable, has functioning healthcare, a large middle class, and expat/repat communities, which make it easier to transfer their lifestyle to Nigeria. But cultural factors have a considerable say in the decision as well, as it is a West African country, where she can finally practice and learn about life there as an embodied experience and not only through virtual contact with her father and family. Maya and Otis are what Karen Fog Olwig would describe as 'privileged middle-class travelers' (2007, p. 90). They did not decide to engage in mobility specifically for economic reasons; social and cultural factors were in the foreground. However, their economic situation was crucial, too. They were not open to just going there and seeing what happened; their migration was carefully prepared. Maya and Otis both wanted to make sure that the move would not harm their economic position and that they would both have jobs which would permit them to also go back to Germany. Sure, they wanted to go to Nigeria, but with the resources and privileges that would make them fit into the category of European expats.

The association of social with geographic mobility today is not only important for people living in countries and regions with a long migration history, nor does it only concern people with limited economic opportunities and resources: Geographic mobility, short or long term, has become an ideal or a strategy within many social milieus and countries around the world – as shown, for example, in Catrin Lundström's study *White Migrations* (2014), on transnationally migrating white Swedish women. Olwig, an anthropologist and specialist in transnational

migration from the Caribbean, emphasises the importance of work on the social construction of class and its relation to transnational mobilities:

> Many if not most people migrate in order to improve, or at least consolidate, their social and economic position, and they are therefore quite conscious of their relative position in society in the place of origin as well as the migration destination. A good point of departure for a critical discussion of the notion of the privileged middle-class traveller, therefore, is an analysis of the social construction of class, including the role of physical mobility for people who self-identify as 'middle class'. (Olwig 2007, p. 90)

Olwig discusses the importance of examining how class changes or adapts to different national contexts and how it intersects with gender and race/ethnicity. Whether one decides to go somewhere to fulfil an ideal or to stay somewhere in order to lead a successful life, the question *should I stay or should I go?* (or return) is one which emerges in many lives and often more than once in a lifetime. It is linked to the desire to make the best of one's life or to do the best for one's family, and to make good life choices in a neoliberal world – a world where you as individual are held to be responsible for making yourself happy and respectable (McGuigan 2014). The sociologist Eva Illouz explains this lonely freedom of choice as a link between capitalism and happiness. In capitalist society, 'one pretends that it lies within one's own power alone to create the circumstances for wellbeing' (*Der Standard* newspaper, Interview 25 October 2019). Yet there are many factors outside of one's range of influence that constrain personal choice, as anthropologist Kath Weston (1997) observes in the case of life-partner choice, for example, or as Hadas Weiss (2019) notes about the structural constraints on the middle class. Maya attached much of her potential happiness to her mobility to West Africa, it is the fulfilment of a dream and of reuniting with family members.

When it comes to work and mobility choices, the process of decision-making can be difficult and full of apparent contradictions for young adults. This can be true even for the kinds of people who should not have to worry much, such as those who come from wealthy and politically stable countries and belong there to an urban middle class with a high level of education. Stabilising their middle-class status through mobility is only one factor which plays a crucial role in Maya and Otis's decision to go to Nigeria. The move is also intended to fulfil their personal wishes, especially for Maya.

The link between mobility and personal happiness

Going to Nigeria is an attempt for Maya to reconnect in many ways. In terms of family, it is a way for her to feel closer to her father who lives in Sierra Leone. The possi-

bility of visiting seems more realistic now she lives in Nigeria than it did before when she was based in Germany. Officially, her move to Nigeria would be categorised as labour migration; Maya B. decided to move only when she and her husband knew they would have jobs there which more or less fitted their professional profiles. But the underlying motivations to move are more personal and relate to the wish to reconnect to family origins which they have not yet explored individually as adults. For Maya, it can be considered a rite of passage that helps her to fully become the person she wants to be and to transmit that to her child, too.

Her father migrated to Germany and it was important for him that his children would be well integrated there. Now Maya is moving in the opposite direction: She wants to rediscover her origins on her father's side so that she is able to pass them on to the next generation. Much like the overseas-born Tonganese youth in Helen Lee's research who return to Tonga for parts of their education to 'learn their culture in order to be truly Tongan' (2017, p. 76), Maya values her experience in Nigeria as way to learn how to be 'West African'. The reference point is not the country of origin of her father, Sierra Leone, but her idenftification is broader: with a region and with African-ness, a concept promoted by Black and African diaspora movements across the world to create community. It is in many ways a 'journey into identity and acceptance' (2017, p. 8), a notion that Lee emphasised. Otis shares that wish, which for him is more attached to an appetite for adventure and discovery of a new life in Nigeria – though not only these things. He himself has a link to Nigeria, as he grew up with a stepfather who is Nigerian and thus Otis was familiar with Nigerian food, music and culture.

The move to Nigeria was a form of roots travel for Maya, Nigeria being in certain respects culturally and geographically close to Sierra Leone. Ever since I have known Maya, since we were teenagers, she has cultivated that wish, although in her teenage years it was also mixed with the desire to live in the USA (see Chapter 3). This changed considerably as an adult in her late twenties, and the USA was replaced by West Africa and an Afro-centredness in general, in terms of literature, music and how she imagined her future living arrangements. This parallels Aminata's developments as described in Chapter 4. The wish to live either in the USA as a teenager or in an African country as an adult was also motivated by wanting to escape or, to a certain extent, 'legitimate' a specific racialised position she experienced in Germany. Because she was of African descent, Maya grew up with questions and looks that made her feel exoticised and othered. *Where are you from?* and *Where did you learn German?* were constant companions. As a child and teenager, the idea of the USA with a large and powerful Black community and, later on, the idea of living in an African country where being Black would be the norm rather than the exception comforted her. Not because she would belong there more or not be racialised – as she knew she was very light skinned for a Black person and would not be seen as native but as white and a foreigner – but she would no longer face stereotypes and prejudices

directed towards 'Africa' as a whole in Germany. She wanted to counter these negative images and the ignorance she often encountered in Europe with a lived reality. Beginning in her teenage years, but increasingly since her late twenties, Maya began to counter negative stereotypes with a celebration of African-ness.

In my research, the act of imaginative rediscovery of self-identity is a product of hidden histories. Hidden histories of Germany as a colonial power or African diasporas in Germany are important motivators for diasporic practice and travel for Maya. Even when we were at school, she tried to include Black histories in presentations, essays and so forth, because she felt that Afrodescendant people were very rarely mentioned in class. Germany's colonial past was hardly raised at all in school, and historical figures presented in class were usually white. That celebration of Africanness led Maya to want to travel to (West) African countries more. Travel is seen as a way to re/discover an imagined essential part of self which has to stay undercover and underexplored in Germany. By travelling, she can practice and train her African identity by visiting places and people in Nigeria or Tanzania (where she went on a student exchange) and by getting to know African histories. It is an attempt to fill a void she felt in herself.

Discarded as essentialist by social scientists, the quest for identity and self often takes that exact meaning for people: the wish to discover one's true and essential self, to discover roots and origins is what motivates many people today – which explains the recent boom in hobby genealogy and the rapid rise of the roots tourism industry or the worldwide trend for genetic testing. Stuart Hall, in his famous text *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, refers to the political role of auto-essentialisation through imagination:

> We should not, for a moment, underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered, essential identity entails. 'Hidden histories' have played a critical role on the emergence of many of the most important social movements of our time – feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist. (1990, p. 224)

Hall is referring here to the identity projects of Black or postcolonial subjects, whose histories have often been neglected, misinterpreted and erased by imperialism and colonialism.

Rediscovery of identity and history in these political contexts is an act of resistance against marginalisation and discrimination. People who were part of feminist, anti-colonial or anti-racist movements seldom find a place in dominant discourses. It is often on the people active in these movements themselves to raise their voices so as to bring their stories to the fore.

Yet further to this celebration of African-ness as an essential part of her identity, travelling is also supposed to transmit to Maya a realistic picture of life in an

African country. When holding discussions with members of Black German movements, Maya was often annoyed when people told her that they had actually never been to the region where their parents came from or even to the African continent in general. She told me during one conversation: 'I cannot believe that they are working in Black movements and themselves have never lived in an African country. Maybe they have been to the USA but not Africa' (10 October 2017). She made this critique because she felt that it was necessary to have a realistic picture of life in an African country. It was not helpful to take references only from media, books and other resources, but it was useful to know the good and bad sides of life in Nigeria, for example, and to not stop at the celebration of Afro-centredness. In order to be active in African diaspora movements, she felt de-exoticisation was necessary on both sides, the ones that celebrated it and the ones who only knew the negative stereotypes of Africa.

Travelling around and living in an African country is seen by Maya as a sort of legitimisation of a political identity as Black German and as an Afrodescendant person in Germany, the country where she grew up. In her research, Andrea Louie (2004) notes that many Chinese Americans travel to China and engage with Chinese culture, primarily to legitimate their position as Chinese Americans in the USA. It works as a form of authentication or justification of identity. Dealing with origins by exploring them through travel serves multiple purposes, which are more connected to the country of residence than the country of ancestral origin: One is the legitimation of identity by getting to know one's parental origins. The other is working against a lack of information about the region of origin in the country of residence. Living in Nigeria is seen by Maya as a way to create her own narratives, memories and stories of Africa – and these differ from the one-sided stories available in Germany, where only rarely does an African country feature in the news and usually then from the view of a white European. These one-sided stories she knows from Germany about Africa (which include almost no stories about Sierra Leone itself) often create negative visions/narratives and make it difficult to achieve a positive identification with being African.

Before going to Nigeria, Maya told me about conversations she had had about her move and about her origins in Sierra Leone. Often the reactions were: 'But is it safe?' 'Are you not afraid of Malaria?' or 'Oh I heard that there are many child soldiers in Sierra Leone'. Such responses were often negative and annoying for Maya because they focused entirely on dangers to safety and health or poverty and war. What is more, often the people making these comments had no knowledge about Nigeria or Sierra Leone at all, yet they still had an opinion.

People in Germany still consider Germans of African descent 'through the prism of cultural difference' (Louie 2004, p. 325) and whether you want it or not, you will be confronted with questions about your non-German origins. When these origins are African (no matter which country), the stereotypes that exist about cultural dif-

ference are more often than not negative and uninformed. Not only will Maya be confronted with these negative regional stereotypes, but they are considered to apply to her, too, as she is seen as 'from there originally'. And one way to address that issue of constantly being confronted with a form of racial othering is to engage with ancestral origins in a constructive way. Hence, travelling, living and working, experiencing everyday life in an African country is a way to become the person Maya wants to be: truly German and Sierra Leonean. Diasporic travel as a way of searching for familiarity in unknown places and a place to practice Maya's 'skills' at being West African, such as speaking, or at least understanding, pidgin or creole, braiding her hair, being able to eat spicy food or mastering the public transport system. These are the skills she told me about with joy.

Reality check: replacing a uniform imaginary with the complexity of reality

The desire to live in a West African country can be translated into a wish to turn 'familiar knowledge' (*connaissance familière*) into 'competent knowledge' (*connaissance compétente*) (de Gourcy 2010, p. 351) of a place. A place that is familiar through stories and family references is not necessarily somewhere one has actually been. To get to know a place *materially*, to get to know its appropriate behaviours and its people, it is necessary to be there and to learn it as an embodied experience – only then does familiar knowledge turn into competent knowledge. This is a key realisation with which every ethnographer is familiar. To know a place and its people, you have to live there, live with them, see and feel how you are perceived and how you perceive others and how these perceptions are open to change over time; this process is the same for my interlocutors. To take a place and one's relations to it out of the imaginary box, you have to go there. In this way the box is filled with new memories and experiences. Maya B. has not been to Sierra Leone or West Africa for more than twenty years. She is familiar with the place because she calls her father almost every day, but her memories of a lived experience are old, they are attached to a faraway child who she no longer is. The fact of having been able to visit her father's village again in 2019 – after moving to Nigeria – has created new memories; memories which match her up-to-date self, her adult self. The trip allows the distance between her memories of the place and her actual self to be erased and replaced with a refreshed view and a vision for the future. This is something which Constance de Gourcy (2010) and Anne-Christine Trémon (2019) explain for roots travellers to Ireland and China, respectively. Being in the place someone defines as the origin of one's ancestors allows the traveller to reconnect with a past they only know from storytelling. Nigeria is also a place where Maya can practice the cultural skills she has learned from her father, in surroundings where these skills are properly valued.

Phone call Lausanne – Lagos

During a phone call in November 2018 – Maya and Otis moved to Lagos a few months earlier – I ask her how she is getting along with language. Usually it is English, and then mostly Yoruba, which she does not speak. But sometimes they also speak a Pidgin English, as they are quite influenced by Nigerian music and the Nigerian film industry, which often uses Pidgin. Maya understands and speaks Pidgin, which she knows from her father, and is proud that she can often tell people that she understood what they said. 'People here say that they hear when someone has a German accent, but with me they never know where to put me!' Maya tells me proudly. She likes the fact that people in Nigeria cannot tell immediately where she is from. 'They sometimes even asked if I was from Ethiopia or South Africa. People are surprised. You don't look German and you don't have the accent. Then I have to explain myself,' which she does not mind; she likes to present them with another picture of Germany, distinct from the one of blond and blue-eyed people with a harsh accent. 'They always want to protect me; for example, they cannot believe that I eat my food very spicy, so they say "careful it is very hot" and then they are surprised. Or when they saw my braids, they were like, "Oh did you do that for the first time?" And then I really have to laugh and tell them "Not at all!"' She has braided her hair since she was a little child. As people in Lagos usually categorise her as European, she is confronted with all the stereotypes attached to that. Having straight hair, eating non-spicy food, having a heavy accent. Maya is able to disrupt that idea a little and she likes that. (Fieldnote, November 2018)

It is not about fitting in physically – because from her looks people in Nigeria would not usually think that she is Nigerian, which is very clear to Maya. But in Lagos she can live and explore a part of herself that she cannot in Germany, living an 'African life' and being proud about how well she manages to fit in. Maya is also very critical about life in Lagos. Living is so expensive, people do not have proper access to electricity, and the differences between rich and poor are too big. 'Nigeria is always taken as an example to follow in Africa, but things are not as shiny when you live here. When you go to the beach it is so disappointing because people use it as a toilet and there is just so much plastic in the sea, it is so frustrating.' For Maya, living in Nigeria is a reality check in terms of personal future-making, which means working out how realistic it really is to build a life there, and in terms of how people actually live in Nigeria.

Most importantly, it is a test: By moving to Lagos, she wanted to come to understand – in experiential and emotional terms – how well she was able to fit in there. How well can she adapt to that different way of life and navigate the reality she experiences? Lagos has a good reputation as a city that is booming economically, culturally and artistically. In Afrocentric media and magazines, in particular, Lagos is associated with prosperity, a growing middle class and a flourishing fashion and entrepreneurial scene, which of course is only one side of the coin, Maya feels: 'A pizza

in one of the fancy restaurants where expats and richer Nigerians go costs ten times as much as a meal from a normal small restaurant. The differences are just too high between rich and poor.' Transport is a real issue for her too. She is used to walking and cycling, but that is impossible in Lagos, where you have to go everywhere by car. Maya works in a government agency, and has many colleagues who cannot afford to live in the capital and have to commute for hours every day. Despite being awkwardly consciousness of being a part of the problem of rising real estate prices – as this is also caused by development agencies, like the one she and her husband work for, which are willing and wealthy enough to pay high prices for accommodation – there is not much Maya and Otis can do to change the situation; they can only acknowledge gentrification as an issue. Other than that, Maya tries to support local businesses and rents from a Nigerian landlord – inspired by pan-African principles of Black solidarity.

In this way, living in Nigeria becomes a confrontation between imagination and reality. Both the myth constructed on social media promoting an Afrocentric vision of the world and the imaginary Africa constructed by Maya were always unlikely to hold when confronted with reality. Maya B. knew that already in theory, and to get to know the reality in practice was her aim.

Conclusion

By considering various trips that Maya B. took in Europe as well as move to Nigeria for work, I explore the specific ways in which these journeys were important in the development of her Afrodiasporic identity. Travelling to Paris as a teenager and to London as an adult let her discover countries with bigger African and Caribbean communities and opened up paths to identify with other Afro-European youth cultures. In her host family, she experienced what Black sisterhood/brotherhood meant in an embodied way – a metaphor she knew from books became a lived reality. She felt a connection between Afrodescendants in these places. Besides her travels in Europe, a long-time existential wish of hers was to live in a West African country. By dwelling in an African country she is able for once to 'legitimate' her racialised position as a German of Sierra Leonean descent who is constantly being asked things such as *Where are you from?* But there is more to it. Living in a country geographically and culturally close to Sierra Leone gives Maya the opportunity to practice cultural skills she had learned through her father in Germany while still enjoying the comfort and security of life in the wealthier country that is Nigeria.

Studies of roots or diasporic tourism often underline the disillusion experienced when these tourists are confronted with the complexity of reality in their countries of 'origin'. Especially for roots tourists/travellers, the images they may have built up can be quite elaborate because the places have such a strong existential value, as they are considered to be the origins of their very selves in various ways. The pressure to

feel some sort of belonging is high and so disappointment is part and parcel of roots tourism. In her book *Performing Africa*, Paulla Ebron (2009) describes the surprise of African American roots travellers in Gambia and Senegal when perceived as 'white' or as just as American as all the others. Meanwhile, in her ethnography *Unorthodox Kin* (2017) Naomi Leite describes the disappointment of Jewish American roots tourists in Portugal upon finding out that the Jewish Marrano community was not officially recognised as Jewish by the religious authorities.

In Maya's case, she did not have the idealised view of Nigeria or Sierra Leone that many more traditional roots travellers would have of their destinations. She knew about everyday life in Sierra Leone through her father and was prepared to face a reality she was not able to fully anticipate. For her, the important thing was to have a lived experience in that reality that would – as she well knew – be very different from her life in Germany. More importantly, she was already aware that she would not be perceived as 'one of them' but be considered a foreigner, even as white. She was prepared for that too. Maya was confident she would be able to confront the reality that she would experience because she had the necessary cultural skills transmitted by her father and she did not have a romanticised picture of life in an African country. She had never totally lost touch with her Sierra Leonean origins; it was just the lived experience that was missing. Yet there were limits to how much she was willing to live that experience: Maya wanted her mobility to happen in the framework available to a German expat. She wanted to live in Nigeria, but always with the option to go back to Germany and resume her middle-class life there. Aside from the disappointment that they highlight, studies on roots travel stress the overall satisfaction of roots travellers who have undertaken such journeys. It is the achievement of an existential goal, regardless of whether it is accompanied by disappointment. Roots travel has often been many years in preparation. It is a project that has grown slowly, and so the trip is only the culmination of that personal project. The feeling is similar for Maya; no matter what her experiences in Lagos were actually like, she did it. She achieved her wish to live in West Africa. It marks the end to an existential journey and the beginning of a potential new relationship with a country and its people.

7. Lafia T.: The long journey to her father's land

Figure 6: Two women, a baby and a pirogue in Dakar, Senegal, 2018 © Lafia T.

Lafia's relationship with her father and the concomitant relationship with her Senegalese origins have been complicated ever since she was a child, as we saw in Chapter 3. Things began to change for her as an adult, and she started to develop a considerable interest in Senegal. A few years ago, when I had already started field-work in Frankfurt, Lafia's wish came true: She, her husband and her father travelled to Senegal. For her, this was a truly existential journey. She got to know her grand-mother and her aunts and uncles, and the possibility of family relations with her Senegalese kin suddenly became an option, something she had not envisaged so far in her life. Until her trip, she had an unclear picture of Senegal and thus of where her father came from and who he had been. By means of this trip, during which

Lafia spent a lot of time with her father, she was able to see where he grew up. She also found out more about the social and economic backgrounds of her extended kin and gained a picture of the complexities of life in Senegal. Many aspects of a positive diasporic identification were created for Lafia during this short trip.

In this chapter I explore Lafia's experience in Senegal – a journey she made as a tourist in 2018. I analyse how holidays can reveal themselves as a catalyst for developing diasporic belonging. In particular, the themes I focus on in Lafia's account are class, kinship and care. How does Lafia understand and build kinship with her relatives whom she met for the first time, and how are the relations influenced by class or national context? But before considering the trip itself, I want to explore what led to the change in how she dealt with her Senegalese heritage – her relationship shifted from rejection as a child and teenager to a wish to explore her origins as an adult. What motivated Lafia to travel to Senegal in her thirties?

Awakening interest in Senegal as a young adult

In describing how she came to be interested in Senegal and the story of her father's migration, Lafia stresses that her educational journey was of considerable importance. Her interest grew gradually, and was stimulated by various encounters with people (positive and negative), books and digital media. Furthermore, because she was of African descent, migration became an important topic during her studies. In the same way that Aminata once explained that her being seen as a person with 'migration background' or a Person of Colour could have a positive outcome for her job in certain instances, this was also the case for Lafia. Although her father's migration history had not played an important role in her personal life up to that point, people often *assumed* it would. For example, there was her student job where she worked in a migration-related project – it was by chance that a colleague told her about an open position and that they were looking for researchers who themselves had migration history in their families. And after a while Lafia herself became really interested in the topic of migration. Another important aspect was the self-analysis she had to do as part of her psychotherapy training where she began to deal with her family history:

> I've been doing this continuing education [as a psychotherapist] since 2015, and [...] I mean at the latest when you start with this education, it is about dealing with yourself. And then, that might be worth telling you, I worked in a research project about migration histories from 2012 to 2016, and now my dissertation is also about motherhood in the context of migration. And in that context, I read texts and dealt in detail with these migration destinies, and I noticed more and more how absurd it was, and that I could not justify any longer that I was deny-

ing the migration history of my father. That I somehow blanked it out? I don't know how you could describe it, but sometimes you have these clear moments where you realise 'Yes sure, he also must be homesick from time to time.' I had to go through a whole intellectual loop and study so long before I was able to acknowledge that for my father. And then I also had a, what do you call it, like a job interview, entrance interview at a training institute, which I decided not to take, but he [they guy there] said like, and I think he himself had Persian roots, anyway he said 'Ah interesting, your husband Irish and you Senegal, how interesting, well travelling there that would be something, especially in light of personal experience [*Selbsterfahrung* – experience of self].' […] But that he – and I was not particularly fond of this man – that he just throws that at me made me think this is always going to be something, and rightly so, even for people that you don't know well, that leads to irritations at first. That you haven't been there, that you know so little about it; that you are so far away from it.

Lafia points to various factors that caused her to start to deal more with her family history: Her training in psychotherapy, where one also has to deal a lot with oneself, was one. It made her realise how little she had dealt with the history of her father. If she wanted to continue in psychotherapy, she had to deal with her family and precisely with her feelings towards and relations with family members. Thus, the relationship with her father became a somewhat central theme during her training. Another aspect was working on a project with recently arrived migrant women. Through the interviews with them and the destinies she encountered, Lafia first became intellectually interested in the topic of migration and individual migration histories. This concern with the stories of others led her back to herself and her father and gave her a strong incentive to also deal with her personal story. Another encounter that was important in her process to actively engage with her Senegalese origins was an unpleasant encounter with a job interviewer who was of Iranian origin. In a job interview he told her that it would certainly be interesting for her to travel to Senegal. This comment from someone who had a migration history themselves confirmed a feeling in her that had already been growing for a while: that it was in fact important to deal with one's origins. Trémon describes the interiorised claim to 'have to know your roots' that persists for descendants of migrants as a 'moral imperative' (2019, p. 5). The fact that this demand exists also for descendants of migrants who were born in a different country than the primomigrant parent indicates the essentialised nature of the claim. Roots in this claim are not something that a person can build throughout their life everywhere, but rather something that is already there in the person and which they must explore in order to know who they truly are. The interviwewer's remark annoyed Lafia, because she also believes this is important and something she has to do – his remark was hurtful and irritating because it hit a nerve, and she felt it was justified. It was thus through dealing with others that she began to deal with herself and her own history. This shows the intersubjectiv-

ity of the self; it is through dialogue and interaction with others that a person constructs their own identity. The perception of self is very much influenced by the look of others, as Jean-Paul Sartre describes in his work on existential anthropology *Being and Nothingness* (1943). He illustrates this intersubjectivity by analysing the feeling of shame that emerges because someone else is looking at you. One becomes conscious of one's own existence through the eyes of the other, which in a way objectifies the self. This is what Sartre qualified as 'being for the other' (*être-pour-l'autre*, p. 455ff). It is only by the *being for other* that the *being in itself* (*être en soi*) is transformed to the *being for oneself* (*être pour soi*). In Lafia's case, the fact that the question came from a person in Germany who had their own migration history and whose Iranian origins were already integrated in their daily life reflects back to her that she is missing (out on) something: 'This is always going to be something, and rightly so, [...] that leads to discomfort at first. That you haven't been there...'. The 'rightly so' surprised me. It meant that she agreed with the claim that she should know her roots. So, as an adult she began to interiorise in her vision of self something that she rejected as a child and teenager.

Besides this ambivalent last encounter, it was mostly positive experiences and incidents which created Lafia's self-interest in Senegal. One of her colleagues at the University recommended *Americanah* by the Nigerian-born author Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi, which was very important in her initial efforts to deal with her Senegalese roots in a positive way. Lafia explains that it was through role-models like Adichie or Taiye Selasi (author of *Ghana Must Go* [2013]), who both write and lecture extensively about the normality of belonging to diverse cultures and living in different countries and who both stress their cosmopolitanism as well as Africanness, that Lafia gradually felt more excited about getting to know her personal African roots.

Americanah also brought her closer to Black and feminist discourses. This novel is about the coming of age of a young woman from Lagos who goes to the USA to study. There she experiences for the first time what it means to be Black – the notion not being of importance in her home country Nigeria. Ifemelu, the main character, finishes writing an important book on race in America and decides to return to Lagos as an adult, where she encounters her ex-boyfriend from school. Adichie describes life in Lagos so well that one really gets a feeling for it without ever having been there. Personally, I cannot remember that hair was an important topic in the book, but for Lafia it was something she took from it. After reading it, she braided her hair for the first time. She did it herself by watching a few tutorials online:

> *Americanah* inspired me, but I think that *Americanah* plays a role in the whole process, that I am doing the travel now and about defining positively your roots, that this book played an important role. Because that was a voice, in contrast to Marie Ndiaye, a Senegalese author who always writes horrible and depress-

ing stuff, like 'fathers are assholes' novels. Not my cup of tea. And that was so sad because it would have been a chance for me to discover Senegal differently, but not with her. And then there is Adichie and Taiye Selasi, whom I admire so much [...] And with Adichie everything is, she is just sooo great. She has such an easiness, even if – yes she is my role model, she is smart but also funny, she has this easiness even if she mediates very difficult things and very political things, and never gets too grim, and then she is also – d'you know 'The power of a single story?' (a TED talk of hers) She is political on such a level that I find great. She is like a sociologist really, right? (Interview, 22 November 2017)

Lafia needed a positive external impetus to make her curious to discover Senegal for herself. Unlike other women in my research, she was not politicised by being active in Black German organisations or via American authors but by different sources. Interestingly, she refers to the French novelist and playwright Marie Ndiaye as being Senegalese, although she was born in France to a Senegalese father with whom she did not grow up. In this moment, Lafia is not aware that she is essentialising someone's identity – something she has known to happen to her as well. As she was looking for something Senegalese or African to help in her identification process, it makes more sense to identify Ndiaye as Senegalese rather than French. In Adichie, she could find a role-model, someone Lafia could identify with – and in terms of social class, she also identifies with the characters Adichie describes, especially the female ones who have a university education and aspirations to be writers or social scientists. It was not one event but a chain of events and encounters, a web of different inputs and experiences that brought her closer to wanting to go to Senegal herself and getting to know the country and her kin there. And of wanting to engage more with her father. So finally, at the end of her twenties, Lafia began to reconsider the idea of travelling with her father. Many things had happened in her life and more importantly during her professional journey. A number of events and thoughts made her become really concrete about her travel plans to Senegal by 2015, but the actual journey took place in 2018. She had finished her studies and was about to get married and they were thinking about having another child (this would be her first child with her husband, and her second overall). Lafia knew that something had come between her and going to Senegal many times already and she was very anxious in case she might never make it. Moreover, Lafia was not the only one who had to be ready for a trip to Senegal: When she proposed the trip to her father, it was he who found excuses for not going in 2015. 'It rained a lot', he said. It took time to convince him and a few unforeseen incidents before Lafia made it to Senegal for the first time in 2018.

Frankfurt, Café Basaglia and a car journey

I meet Lafia for lunch, and we talk about her job and the #metoo debate, which is the hot topic of the season. After a while, we get to talk about Senegal again. Her father never told her much about Senegal, only bits and pieces, but for a while now, as he recently went back there after many years, he has started sending her pictures and telling her what he is up to in Dakar. He is sending her pictures of friends, family and artists. She shows me a few. I ask her why she thinks that he is more open to it now – Lafia is not sure. She remembers that her aunt (her mother's sister), who is a traveller, was at her wedding. This aunt told her father at the wedding that she had been to Senegal and had travelled around the country a lot. 'Maybe that gave him a taste of wanting to become a tourist in his country as well?' When Lafia was younger, her father did try to teach her a few things, for example djembe, making music together, but her mother, she feels today, kept Senegal quite out of their life all together. 'Only after many years did he tell me, as an aside, that my name means "princess",' Lafia tells me, while she tries to convey to me what her father is like. Today is the first time that she really feels she is open to getting to know the country; she is curious. Maybe this is also why her father is more open about it? (Fieldnote, 24 January 2018)

Roots travel to Senegal – May 2018

Lafia tells me that she and her husband are in the mood for travelling and that they have decided to really take the trip to Senegal soon. 'So who knows', she tells me 'Maybe next time we see each other, it will be about the trip.' (Fieldnote, 31 January 2018, after phone call)

Indeed, this was the case: After our encounter in January 2018, I saw Lafia again following her trip to Senegal. She had come to Vienna for a PhD workshop in June and stayed at our house. Her trip had taken place about a month before, and I can see how happy she still was to have been there. She tells me about the family they stayed with, how well they got along and how much she would love to return soon. As we do not have much time together in Vienna, we schedule an interview about her trip to Senegal for later.

Phone call Lausanne–Frankfurt

I am happy to be on the phone with Lafia, and she immediately asks how I envision the interview about her journey to Senegal, which took place exactly one year ago. I am in Lausanne and Lafia is in Frankfurt. Lafia has just completed her final exams in psychotherapy and is now trying to have a bit more

free time. After our call she will go to her grandmother's house in the Swabian Jura mountains in southwest Germany with some friends. I say that I would be pleased if she were to tell me in detail about the Senegal trip she took last year with her husband. When they travelled there in 2018, her father had already been there for a few months. Lafia was very apprehensive prior to the trip. The initial plan was to go there with her father and younger half-brother, but there were many work-related problems for Lafia – plus she had not been on a trip alone with her father for many years, and in the end her husband David also came along. The main motivation for Lafia was to get to know Senegal and most of all her relatives, especially her grandmother, whom she had never met. (Fieldnote, 3 May 2019)

In many ways, Lafia's trip to Senegal was a confrontation between imagination and reality. Not that she had constructed a powerful image of Senegal already, but she had anticipated that moment for a long time and was very excited. What she did expect was that the trip would be an opportunity to reconnect with her father, to get to know him better by getting to know where he comes from – which is something that did happen, but brought a lot of disillusionment with it as well. For Lafia, this is diasporic travel in so far as it is a journey to the origins of her father and an attempt to make these origins her own as well.

Lafia wanted to discover Senegal to create an attachment, an identification – she wanted to create her own memories and affinities with the place and its people, and find out what she thought and felt about everything. Overall, as she sums up her trip during our interview, it was a wonderful experience, and the year that has passed since also seems enough time to see the more negative experiences with more distance. 'If I am honest I would like to be there right now', is how Lafia starts our conversation. Whenever Lafia moves a bit too quickly in her account, I try to slow her down with questions about her daily or weekly schedules, trying to give her more time to develop her experiences. The interview took place on 3 May 2019.

The role of family in roots travel

Right from the beginning, our interview orbits a lot around family. The first aspect was meeting her father at the airport in Dakar, as he had already been in Senegal for a few months.

Lafia: I don't remember in detail what happened at the airport, but there was my father waving, he was totally excited that I had come there for the first time. He was behind some kind of barrier and climbed onto something and waved wildly.
Silvia: So you could really see how emotional he was?

> Lafia: Yes, totally excited. And he was with someone – I think the son of his landlord – so he had somehow employed someone for a few days, to drive us around. He came to get us with the car and we drove around in this old Mercedes and he took us to a cousin of my father, where we stayed […] Ouakam, is the name of the neighbourhood, and then we met everyone. (Interview, 3 May 2019)

This memory of her father being excited and waiting at the airport is an important one, because it is purely positive. She remembers how happy he was. Things got a bit more complicated after a few days together, but this memory reminds her of the joy and excitement around the whole trip. One thing that Lafia often stresses in her account is that she was overwhelmed by the care that people showed and the relaxed manner of communication among people. She explains this in more detail in the next extract, which carries a lot of the meaning that the trip had for her – the care she received from relatives she had never met. This was the cxase, for instance, at her host family, where the woman of the house was a matrilateral cousin of her father, Madame Bintu F. She is the daughter of Lafia's grandmother's sister. Lafia's father Aliou referred to Bintu as a sister and to Bintu's mother as a mother. Bintu F. (who is in her forties) is about ten years younger than Aliou (who is fiftysomething) and the two families grew up very close. So people communicated with Lafia as if she were family – no matter whether they were actually genealogical relatives. This is why Lafia felt so welcome there and another reason that this journey was of existential value:

> It was such a profound and existential enrichment, to get to know them, and also such a connection between many […] for the women there was one sentence that is really telling for me, you often encountered such a tenderness in the sentence 'C'est pas grave' [she accentuates the easygoingness in her voice], that means 'It's no problem', and like, 'Oh don't worry'. And no matter what the thing was, we'll work it out somehow. And my French got better, but I also understood a little bit of Wolof. […] There was something about the communication, something about spending time together, like oh well let's first cook something and eat and then – you usually eat all together from big plates. When you are visiting it is all about 'Come sit down, I will prepare some food,' and then there is always this incredibly tasty food – a dream! Like, 'Everything is fine no matter what happened so far or what your plans are, first we will eat together.' And with the men that was very pronounced – in Saint Louis we also stayed with an old schoolmate of my father, a different one, and he greeted us with a 'Aah ma fille', like 'Come here my daughter'. And many people greeted me like that, and I feel that stands for something that I experienced in this place: that there is such an incredible relaxedness and connection and no matter if someone brings their

daughter, sister, cousin, when she comes here to visit she will be my daughter. It is more the tone that was very touching, it was more about that.

The importance of spending time and sharing food with each other in the way Lafia describes has been remarked upon by kinship scholars for many years. Mary Weismantel (1995), Janet Carsten (2004) and Marshall Sahlins (2011a) all stress the overall importance of sharing substances and caring for the practice of making kinship.
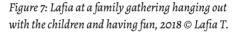
The themes Lafia speaks about here came up many times during our conversation about her trip; she talked repeatedly about how people cared for her and her husband, especially in her host family – the family of the matrilineal cousin of her father who grew up closely with him.

Lafia associates the cooking and eating habits with a certain relaxedness, with something that made her feel at ease in these completely unknown surroundings. It helped her quickly feel included in everyday family life. Yet it was not this aspect alone that contributed to making kinship. Up until then, her references to Senegal had orbited around her father, with whom it was difficult to identify, but in Senegal she met relatives with whom she could connect easily. This made identification with being Senegalese easier. Another aspect that Lafia mentioned was resemblances, especially in terms of lifestyle but also of character, between her and her relatives. When she talks about her host family, she particularly points to the resemblances in character. Lafia felt a special connection with her aunt and uncle's family, with whom they stayed: 'I can imagine just meeting them once a week here in Frankfurt and talking about anything and everything; it would be nice.' With other relatives she did not have the same feeling, such as in the case of an uncle who was often in her grandmother's house. He was a teacher, and Lafia mentioned that with him, too, communication was very good and in terms of lifestyle their lives were not so different, but she simply did not feel the same connection as with her host family.

Taken together, the practices of caring for her and her husband, and the resemblances that Lafia felt with some of these relatives contributed to a kin-making process. This was also supported by the symbolic practice of using kin terms for people who are not actually biological kin. This is not a custom found in Germany, and it surprised Lafia in a positive way. The use of kinship terms by friends of her father and more distant relatives, and the behaviour that went with it made her feel welcome in Senegal – it caused her to feel part of a family and not a stranger anymore. Lafia also remembered a weekend family reunion where she quickly felt herself to be part of the group. Significant in this feeling was that no one made a big deal out of her presence; she and her husband could blend into the family crowd without people paying particular attention. Their presence was not called into question – she was the daughter of Aliou, and that was enough.

Lafia: On Fridays, there was a cousin's place in another neighbourhood where everyone would meet and there everyone would eat together. It was like the lady of the house together with about three others would have to cook for about two days, and then in the living room they would put a big blanket on the floor and in the middle one big plate and then you would eat there half together, half spread out. This was in the neighbourhood of Joff, at this cousin's place – there were really about twenty or twenty-five people, who came there with all the kids [...] they were all there and spent some time together.

Silvia: And did they all know you? Because I'm sure that is not so easy, to just meet twenty people you don't know, and plus kids and so on…

Lafia: Yes, but it was not such a big deal, it was like 'Oh how nice that they are here with us', and of course the first meeting was like 'Oh well, that is Aliou's daughter' but I think it actually happens a lot that someone brings along someone and then they just think, 'Ah right you are also another cousin of mine.' But it doesn't draw so much attention, like it would be here [in Germany] when you bring someone, for example if I brought someone for Christmas, that would be more intense. And there because there are always so many people it is not a [big deal].

Figure 7: Lafia at a family gathering hanging out with the children and having fun, 2018 © Lafia T.

Lafia also felt it was easy to be part of the large family because people did not make a big deal of her presence there. This made it easier to blend in and participate in the gathering. Again, Lafia points to the importance of sharing food for the feeling of togetherness and community. It is an aspect that she liked and admired, something she would like to include in her everyday, too. She also grew very fond of the children in the family. At family gatherings she attended, Lafia enjoyed hanging out with the children and, when looking at the picture shown in Figure 13, Lafia told me recently that it was one of her favourite moments of all time. It connected her with her carefree childhood in Heidelberg, where she was more a part of West African circles and had many friends of mixed heritage before moving to Frankfurt with her mother. 'I know I should have been hanging out with the adults in the other room, but the kids were so much fun' (Phone call, 30 November 2020).

This trip was also about figuring out things and people, about learning how life is in Senegal. And one crucial thing was comparing her life and her relatives' lives in terms of socioeconomic status, so our conversation turned around class and status, too. Lafia knew very little about the family's circumstances so far, only what her father had told her:

> The people we stayed with are a couple in their forties [a lawyer and a project developer], who have three kids, two still live at home, and they have plenty of domestic workers. This is how it is there for the middle class, so people like you and me would have many people who cook for them and do the household chores. [...] And the house was crowded all the time because of the domestic workers, there was always someone cooking [...] and you would say that is middle-class life [...] most of the family I would say are middle class, but you need some time to understand that first. It's a funny mix, and I only really knew that from my family in a fragmented way; I knew that my grandparents had been at the post office and many members of the family had worked at the post office – so I imagined something more petty bourgeois/lower middle class (*kleinbürgerlich*), but actually they had positions that seemed more middle class.

All Lafia had known was that some members of the family had worked at the post office, but there were no details about their particular positions there. Thinking about what that job would mean in terms of status and economic wealth in Germany, she situated her family in a lower middle-class milieu before going there, and was surprised to find that their lifestyle was more fitting of an upper middle-class milieu. The upper middle class in Senegal differs from the same status in Germany though: In Senegal, it would entail having house staff for cleaning and cooking, which is not very common in Germany. Nevertheless, Lafia concluded that her Senegalese family's lifestyle was more or less comparable with how she lived in Germany. If Lafia lived in Senegal, their lifestyles would probably be comparable. That is different from

what Aminata experiences in Ghana (which we will see in the next chapter), where she is confronted with a different socioeconomic milieu from that of her family at home. By being there and spending time and living with her aunt's family, Lafia was able to get a feeling for who they were and their positions in Senegalese society. This helped her to create understanding and points of identification with family members.

Motivation and experience with her father

In terms of memories with her extended family, Lafia only has joyous ones. The experiences with her father were more ambivalent. One place Lafia, her husband David and her father Aliou went to was Saint Louis, the city where her father grew up. In general, Lafia loved Saint Louis, and she was able to describe things and atmospheres from a point of view closer to that of a tourist and sightseer, but on a personal level it was more difficult. Explaining that part of her trip reveals many personal motivations and how expectations clashed with what she experienced. During our interview, when she talks about her time in Saint Louis, at first Lafia only talks about her impressions of the city. It is actually me who brings up her father:

> Silvia: You were there with your father, right?
> Lafia: Right [...] in itself I also found it was really great and I also loved it – yes to see where my father is from, like really in detail, which house, which street, where he hung out as a child and as a teenager... but actually already the journey to Saint Louis was overshadowed by an atmosphere, because my father [...] in general, the whole holiday was supposed to be a sort of quest/search for traces [*Spurensuche*] and a turning toward my father in a different way; [but it] resulted, in relation to him, in a total – well a very big disappointment actually [her voice sounds a bit broken here, but it could be the bad connection]. I just realised, the way I had wished to experience that with him or at least experience that partly with him was simply not possible, and that was something... now I am thirty, so that was like a final experience of what I wished for as a child, what I dreamed of did not happen. So it was confirmed that it is simply not possible that he just takes two weeks to plan and do something together and that he says I will take care of this, or I will be reliable or, hmm..., or I will take on the role – and that was always an issue – I will take on the role of an adult, as a father. That did not happen. Rather, it was turned around, so I noticed that actually it is my partner who takes care of stability and solidity, who plans things. And us two together also do this more than my father.

This seems revealing of many aspects of Lafia's relationship with her father, most of all that one big challenge throughout her life was that he did not act as a father figure to her, especially in relation to care tasks. As the interview takes place a year after the trip, she is able to analyse the situation from a distance. And her psycho-

logical training also helps her make sense of her feelings as she is able to analyse father–child relations on a more general and abstract academic level. Lafia wished for stability and solidity instead of unreliability and thought that maybe when he was in his environment of origin this could be different, that their relation could be different – at least for a little while. The aspect of caring was an important matter for Lafia throughout the whole time in Senegal: She was taken care of by the relatives she did not know before, which made feeling part of the family easier. Yet she was not able to get the care she had hoped for from her father. Lafia had wanted to discover that, after all, her father was a different person in the surroundings of his place of origin.

> Silvia: But in the beginning you said that he welcomed you at the airport and organised someone to drive around with you?
> Lafia: And this encounter was real, he really stood there like an excited wind-up doll [*Aufziehmännchen*] and waved and was so happy, so that does stay a happy memory, but a lot happened in the following days, where I realised, eieieiei, that he really is a very scatty [*schusselig*], unreliable, neurotic person. And when we came back [from Saint Louis] at first I was not sure how the rest of the family saw this matter, do they see it like… like my father, that it is actually on us to pay for everything and to be grateful and have to respect him just because he is the older one? Or do they see it more like us?
> Anyway, we never talked about that, but I did experience that, in comparison to all the other relatives that I got along very well with, my father was an exceptional phenomenon. And that his unreliability really had nothing to do with culture or a somehow 'African mentality', and that all other relatives were more comparable to me or all my other relatives [laughs, she means her German relatives], so…

The last part of what Lafia says here is interesting because she mentions the idea of a connection between her father and Senegal. She had never been sure whether many things that she did not fully understood or even disliked in her father were due to his socialisation in Senegal and that was the reason why it was difficult for him to adapt in Germany, or whether he was just a complicated man. As a result of the trip to Senegal with her father, Lafia began to sense that it was not so much due to any cultural difference per se but her father's personality that made their relationship tense. This reflection of hers about his unreliability also brings another thing to the surface: the stereotypes and assumptions that exist in Germany about 'Africans' and that she was probably confronted with a lot because she has an African parent. Very quickly in Germany the reason for someone's irrational or complicated behaviour will be classified as 'cultural difference' if that person is not German. In a sense, by way of the trip, Lafia was able to deconstruct racialised prejudices she knew from German socialisation against 'Africans' as a whole. She no longer attributed her fa-

ther's behaviour to his cultural background, especially because as Lafia got to know other family members she was able to put into context and expand what 'Senegalese' meant to her. It began to be easier to identify herself as Senegalese as well, because she met so many relatives with whom she was glad to identify. It was this lived experience that gave her the tools to make sense of her own Senegalese heritage and to demystify it – she was able to relate. This took an existential weight off her shoulders. Lafia's time in Senegal opened a door for her to be in contact with her family and deal positively with her origins.

After Lafia had come back, I met her in Frankfurt in the summer of 2018. She had cooked a Senegalese meal, and stated that she wanted to become the 'ambassador' of *thiéboudienne*, a Senegalese dish. While she was in Senegal, she had associated food and cooking with care and the generally pleasant atmosphere, and cooking the dishes in Germany today works like a reconnection to her father and to her journey to Senegal.

> Silvia: And then you came back in mid-May. And do you still cook this one, this meal?
> Lafia: Yes I tried out a few things, my brother just recently told me 'What, you don't know *riz gras*????' It's a red rice dish [...] Well, that is something I still need to learn. Besides that I cook *thiéboudienne*, fish with rice, and then you add meat, mostly beef, it is meat with three different vegetables and a tomato sauce base, and then rice. And then you can try different varieties. My father also sometimes did – ah yes, and then there is this dish with peanut sauce, *mafé*, he cooked that a lot.

Her trip to Senegal in 2018 has forged a pathway for Lafia to make kinship in Senegal. How it will evolve is still uncertain, but at least her wish came true: to be in Senegal, to discover the country of her father, with her father. Now she knows her relatives there and is able to engage in ongoing relations. For more than thirty years that had seemed improbable and now through a short visit the door has opened to renew these diasporic relations.

Filling the void of an interrupted transmission

A rupture in the cultural transmission of a country of origin can happen due to a silence in the family. This can come about because of difficult circumstances in the country of destination, painful relations or memories in the country of origin or due to structural circumstances that make contact difficult. 'Filling the voids' is key in all kinds of roots or existential travel (Basu 2007, Cohen 1979, Kim 2010, Lee 2007, Ueda 2009). It is a central motif for the participants of my research who have one parent, mostly the father, who migrated to Germany in the 1970s – often on student schol-

arships from West Germany – from countries such as Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ghana and Senegal. Maya and Aminata, having grown up with their fathers, were a bit more in contact with people from the small Guinean or Sierra Leonian communities in Frankfurt. But Lafia, who did not grow up with her father, who lived in Heidelberg, was not very well exposed to her Senegalese 'roots'. The French filmmaker Alice Diop talks about this kind of rupture of transmission in her film *Les Sénégalaises et la Sénégauloise* (2007).[1] The fact that her Senegalese parents did not focus on cultural transmission because everything related to the African continent was stigmatised in their country of residence – France – made her feel rather distant from it as well, although both parents were primomigrants from Senegal.

Lafia started to develop an interest in Senegal as an adult and it was twofold: There was the wish to 'occupy' her origins positively – as she says, using a vocabulary of psychology that fits her professional background – and the desire for independence from her father. This meant creating associations with Senegal that were positive reference points she could draw from for herself. But dealing with Senegal also became a way to deal with her father's migration history and to try to rebuild her relationship with him. Indeed, expressing an interest in the country of a parent can be translated into showing an interest in the parent. Zahouia, the student interviewed by sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad in the 1970s, explains how her interest in Algeria made her father, who had migrated from Algeria to France, very happy. Lafia informed me that comments like 'Where are your origins?' and people being surprised when she told them she had never been to the country of origin of her father, made her not want to go to Senegal at all for a long time. As an adult. things changed for many different reasons – Lafia began to interiorise the claim to 'have to know her roots', her Senegalese origins. She thought that maybe it was necessary to get to know Senegal after all, and to understand the story of her father who took that difficult step of leaving his home and coming to Germany.

'You have to know where you come from'. Following a group of Tahitian roots tourists in China, the anthropologist Anne-Christine Trémon (2019) writes that a major motivation for the Tahitians of Chinese descent is this 'moral imperative' (p. 5) that many have interiorised (in this case stemming from Confucianism). But it is not only pressure from outside that Lafia has interiorised and that sparked her interest. She has dealt intellectually with topics such as migration or othering and perceiving how others have dealt with the same problems, and has been able to apply this knowledge to her own story. Trémon (2019) argues that diasporic relations between people and places can be interrupted due to different events and developments (personal, political or historical), but they can also be taken up again at another time – they have to be seen as a process in time and place, and always depending on the

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1   For a summary of the film, see: https://www.worldcat.org/title/senegalaises-et-la-senegaul
     oise/oclc/818985004 (accessed 15 September 2020).

motivations of the people and places in question. In Trémon's example, she shows how the Chinese state at times favoured contact with its overseas citizens and at other times frowned upon it. Opportunities for travel and maintaining diasporic relations depend on institutional and legal frameworks. In the case of China, maintaining contact with overseas relatives could, in certain historical circumstances, be subject to sanction, rendering diasporic relations almost impossible. Relations were then taken up again once the legal and institutional frame allowed it. Another level is the individual: Diasporic relations can only exist if there are people on multiple sides who want to maintain them. Nazia Ali and Andrew Holden (2006), in their research on second-generation British Pakistani youth, found that a trip to Pakistan was often undertaken as a kind of fulfilment of duty to the migrant parents. In Lafia's case, it is less about the duty she feels towards her father than a duty to society at large, where people would ask about her Senegalese roots that she felt she had to fulfil.

8. Aminata Camara: Negotiating privilege, kinship and care in diasporic travel

Aminata Camara, now in her thirties, feels rooted and at home in Germany. Nevertheless, especially since she has had children of her own, it has been a wish of hers to engage in a continuous relationship with West Africa and to transmit her African origins (Guinean on her side and Ghanaian on her husband's) to the next generation. They finally made a family trip to Accra in 2016, when the kids were five and one.

Following that initial family visit, Aminata's idea now is to go every few years in order to tune in to life there and become accustomed to Ghana – to properly get to know the surroundings, everyday life, and potentially to build a house. More particularly, she wants to get to know her kin and for her family become members of the community. David Duval (2004) and Lauren Wagner (2008) both point out that a central motivation of 'return' visits or family visits can be to increase or normalise relations with transnational family. In his study on the meanings of return visits of Caribbean migrants in Toronto, Duval (2004) found that for many primomigrants 'full return' was not the desired ideal; it was more important to be able to potentially combine the best of both worlds and, if possible, to engage in a transnational life. That is even more the case for descendants of migrants for whom full return is not an option, as they were born and socialised in another country than that of their parents. In this chapter, I contend that the experience of diasporic travel is not only a way to reimagine what home and belonging mean but that it is also a ground for experiencing and facing one's own shifting social, cultural and economic positions.

In the previous chapter, I examined Lafia's roots travel, which was also a family visit.

Here, the main point of the visit is to meet family with whom Aminata has regular contact, although they have not yet seen each other in the flesh. Although Aminata lives with her family in Frankfurt, they are part of the family in Ghana, too, as Albert's mother lives there and regularly receives news from Ghana. Much like in Maya's case, diasporic relations are part of the family's everyday environment. Aminata travelled with her family to Ghana a few years ago. This was not roots travel in the first sense for Aminata, as her father is from Guinea. Rather, Ghana is the country of parental origin of both of Albert's parents. It was thus a trip to meet her

in-laws, a diasporic journey in the sense that it was her first experience of travel to West Africa since she had lived there as a child, and it was an initiation in travel for her children, too. One motivation was to establish family relations with distant kin, but there was more to the trip for Aminata. It was an important step towards her future goal of engaging in a transnational life between Germany and Ghana:

> When we go next time, we also want to take a look into how we could construct a future there – not in the sense of moving there or something, but how we could build our life there when Sofian is also a bit older; maybe not even next year, but when Sofian is five or six and both kids are able to really have a relation to it. (Interview, November 2018)

Aminata had mentioned the trip to Ghana on several occasions, but I asked her if at some point she wanted to tell me about it in more detail. She agreed, and one morning in November 2018 while I was in Lausanne and she in Frankfurt, we had a Skype chat where she told me about her family trip. Telling me about the trip was also a chance for her to reflect on the journey again and to indulge in reminiscence – an opportunity to reflect on her actions and reactions in unfamiliar surroundings, which made more sense to her now that some time had passed. Aminata is able to interpret her behaviour in past situations, demonstrating what Webb Keane has coined the ability to 'self-objectify' (2003, p. 236). She sees herself from a distance in time and place, and judges her actions and reactions analytically. Although the trip was more than two years ago, Aminata could remember many details vividly:

> We had actually wanted to travel to Ghana since forever – even before Sofian was born – simply because the grandmother of the children doesn't live in Germany, and Mia has never seen her grandma. So we had wanted to do it for a long time already, but there were concerns about health, so we said we want to do this when Mia is a bit older, and then Sofian came, so we said we cannot wait again that long, this is simply not possible. Therefore, we said we will just wait until he is one, because then he can be vaccinated. Then we decided to take grandpa [Albert's father] with us of course, because he hasn't been there either for, like, 100 years – I'm not sure, but I reckon 30 years or something. So we decided that, and fortunately we also had the financial means to do it, because [such a trip] is really expensive.

Forging kinship in Ghana – the importance of trust and care

Aminata is affiliated to her Ghanaian kin through her husband and her children. For her children in particular, she wants this extended family link with Ghana to be long lasting, because she wants the kids to have a connection to West Africa. The

Ghanaian family members, especially Albert's mum, started to be a part of her life when she met Albert, and more importantly when they had children together. I asked her at the end of the interview if she also wanted to go back to Guinea one day, as this was where her father was from and where she had lived a few years as a child. Aminata said that she did, but also remarked that it was more complicated to go to Guinea than to Ghana. There were several reasons for this, but particularly because the relations to the family in Ghana were already there, stable and durable; she felt it was easier to establish that filiation than for Guinea – all her close family was in Germany. Aminata used these four weeks of travel to create bonds and links with Albert's family in Ghana, to get the feeling of being part of a family there. Aminata and her family spent a lot of time in Albert's mother's house where they stayed, and there were visits from close kin (uncles and aunts, cousins) as well as more distant relatives (people from the same village of origin of the mother, who were considered distant kin). Aminata spent much time with her mother-in-law, helping in the household, for example, and the rest of the time was about hanging out together at the house and getting acquainted with the people who came by and becoming accustomed to the rhythm of life. Kinship relations are not just there through genealogy or filiation – they have to be created in practice by sharing one another's existence, becoming part of each other's lives, as Marshall Sahlins writes in *What kinship is (and is not)* (2011a, 2011b). With the idea of 'mutuality of being', Sahlins describes the circumstances under which members would consider each other close kin: It usually includes sharing a certain everyday existence, taking care of each other, being in contact regularly – hence, being in mutual relations of care and communication. This also reflects how kinship is made socially in the case of the Zumbagua people in Ecuador, who were studied by Mary Weismantel (1995): It is through nurturing practices, repetition and time that someone becomes a parent – it is about giving and receiving care.

Substances that can be shared for a kinship tie to be created – instead of blood, semen or milk – can also be food, money and even simply time.

For Aminata and her husband's family in Ghana, the diasporic kinship relations exist in the form of a range of exchanges – especially the exchange of information in the form of telephone calls with Albert's mother. In Ghana, Aminata did not simply feel part of the family right from the start; she did not know most people at first. Trust was something that developed over those four weeks in Ghana. When it came to trusting other people with her children, especially her younger one, kinship was put to the test.

When analysing the process of making kinship, Sahlins uses 'being' and 'existence' interchangeably in his concept of 'mutuality of being/existence'. In her attempt to interpret Sahlins' mutuality of being as a model for explaining diasporic kinship, Trémon (forthcoming) proposes framing mutuality of being and mutuality of existence as distinct entities. She suggests that 'mutuality of being' refers to be-

ing part of the same lineage and that 'mutuality of existence' instead presupposes the sharing of a certain everyday life with each other, of being actively involved in one another's lives. The latter is usually possible for close kin. And close kin can be two things: kin that might be distant in lineage but close geographically, or kin that are close in lineage but geographically distant. Between close kin, a community of existence, a sharing of a certain everyday life, is possible. With distant kin, both distant in terms of lineage and geographically, there can be a mutuality of being, a belonging to a group of kinship, but without the involvement in one another's lives. Working with that distinction allows us to understand Aminata's relationships to her distant kin in Ghana. Before going to Ghana, a mutuality of being existed – they were related and acknowledged that kinship relation in their lives – but there was no mutuality of existence. Aminata was not much included in their everyday lives, nor they in hers (except for Albert's mother, with whom they were already in close contact). Aminata had to get to know the family members to get a feeling for whom she could trust. Trust is key to building a relationship as family members.

The pool accident – kinship put to the test in an existential crisis

During our conversation, Aminata told me about an incident that had made her question the whole travel endeavour. After a week in Accra during which time they met people from the neighbourhood and spent a lot of time in the house with the family, they wanted to have a day at a swimming pool, to relax there with the kids. Unfortunately, as Aminata explained, her one-year-old son Sofian had an accident:

> Kadadje, Albert's cousin, is very tall but he is actually quite young, and Sofian was in the water with them, and Albert just wanted to swim one small lap and gave him Sofian, and Sofian made a move, and Kadadje can't swim, he could stand, the water was not deep, but somehow he just… let him go. Sofian sank like a cork, and I jumped into the water – with my shoes on, clothes, bag, everything – and got him out. Everything happened within seconds, so Albert didn't hear how I screamed, so I jumped in and took the child out [she takes a deep breath]. That was so horrible, it was sooo terrible, and for a week or so you could do nothing with me, because I was so afraid. […] And suddenly everything was super strenuous, because suddenly I feared for the death of my son, every second I feared for my child. […] And I also just realised, I am such a '*krasse*' [emphasising something stiff and tense] potato [*Kartoffel*, a word denoting something stereotypically German] that I am really not able to relax, I am just not able to, and I mean that makes me a typical German. At least that is how I defined it, because, I mean, what's a life there? Life doesn't count for much there, every day someone is talking about a person who died of Malaria, that is the standard. Death is an everyday occurrence.

So, Aminata's mood went from euphoria to 'I somehow have to make it through two more weeks.' After the incident with Sofian, she was suspicious; she needed time to feel safe for her children again, to build trust. Although she says it in an ironic way, well aware that she is playing with stereotypes, the remark that after that moment she realised how German she was is nonetheless interesting, because it reveals how she constructs an understanding of herself. She reflects on the importance of social-isation for forming the self, especially in terms of emotions.

Aminata is trying to make sense of her reactions and emotions but is left with a feeling of unease. In the moment of the accident, her agency slips away; she has no control over the situation. She would not have had control over the situation any-where, but the fact of it happening in unfamiliar and, for her, rather unsafe sur-roundings made things worse. Describing the situation in retrospect, Aminata looks at herself with the eyes of someone else, and as she tells me, it reminds her of the negative stereotype of the *Kartoffel* (potato)– a German who is not able to relax.

Although the accident would have been stressful anywhere and for every par-ent, because it happens in Ghana among her husband's family, where she does not know the rules and is doing her best to blend in, she projects on herself this German stereotype of the 'potato'. She feels she somehow overreacted, too, because of the un-familiar environment and the unknown people who – in this instant of emergency and crisis – were not able to calm her down. She did not know them well enough to trust them. Another preoccupation was the unfamiliar health system and the dif-ferent health risks that they faced in Ghana: fear of Malaria, fear of being far from good healthcare or a healthcare system one knows and trusts, become crucial in such a moment. In these instances of stress and fear, I believe that Aminata experiences a form of 'displacement' – a feeling of being out of place. Displacement as defined by anthropologist Georgina Ramsay (2019) is a feeling of existentially losing control of one's life. In this case, because she does not know how to navigate an unknown sit-uation and suddenly senses that she is not able to determine her and her children's future, Aminata experiences just such a phenomenon:

> I define displacement here as an existential experience of contested temporal being, in which a person cannot reconcile the contemporary circumstances of their life with their aspirations for, and sense of, the future. That is, displacement is a fundamental disruption to the teleology of life: an experience, whether acute or chronic, that pulls a person out of the illusory comfort of a life with stability and into a reality of a future that is not only uncertain, but which is determined by forces that are outside of their direct control. (Ramsay 2019, p. 4)

In Aminata's case, the external forces outside of her control are geopolitical constel-lations which cause inequality, for example in terms of healthcare, and, on a personal level, the fact that she had placed her son in the care of a cousin of Albert's whom

she had not known for very long. Although she might well not be in control should such an accident happen in Frankfurt either, the healthcare system is good and the health risks are smaller in Germany; in those familiar surroundings, she would know straight away where to go or whom to call. It is easier to keep up the sense of control and stability over one's life in those circumstances.

By positing the idea of 'a sense of temporal displacement' (2019, p. 1), Ramsay wishes to untie the tight knot that limits studies of displacement to refugees and migrants and to propose that it can be felt and experienced by everyone – for instance, everyone can feel displaced by the effects of global capitalism and neoliberal restructuring. She argues for a framework that includes migrants and non-migrants alike in 'shared rhythms of displacement' (2019, p. 1). I contend that this is how Aminata felt in the moment of the incident and in days that followed. The feeling of displacement coincides with a feeling of losing control, which is more likely to occur in places or instances which are unknown and unfamiliar or with people one does not trust. In Aminata's case, it happened during a holiday in an unfamiliar country. She told me that after the incident she had the intense desire to go back to Frankfurt, a place she knows how to navigate – that she is familiar with:

> It was not possible for me to engage with the country normally anymore, I felt more like: 'Okay, now I will just hold on and make it through the next two weeks.' That was the state of mind, of course alternating with – what a relief that the Grandpa ['*Opa*'] was there who also had an eye on Sofian, and always made sure that he was fine. And, of course, everyone wanted him to be safe, but I was just totally traumatised, I called my mother and cried because I thought you know…

Another way of framing this incident and Aminata's reaction is in terms of Jarrett Zigon's concept of a 'moral breakdown', a time of crisis when a person is forced to think about a way to go back to a status quo in order to alleviate crisis:

> I suggest an anthropology of moralities should be limited to what I have called moral breakdowns. That is, it should be limited to those social and personal moments when persons or groups of persons are forced to step-away from their unreflective everydayness and think-through, figure out, work on themselves and respond to certain ethical dilemmas, troubles or problems. These moral breakdowns are characterised by an ethical demand placed on the person or persons experiencing the breakdown, and this demand requires that they find a way or ways to 'Keep Going!' and return to the everydayness of the unreflective moral dispositions. (2007, p. 140)

The ethical demand for Aminata was to not go back to Germany in that moment and to not shut the door on her and her children getting to know the country and their relatives. It was a question of accepting that such an accident could happen, while

not holding the surroundings or the cousin fully responsible. She had to find a way to 'keep going', as Zigon suggests, to quickly find a compromise. For Aminata this 'keeping going' meant making it through the weeks in Ghana by insisting more on her own schedule and boundaries and not always following the rules and habits of her host family. This entailed keeping the nuclear family together constantly, not being apart for an extended period. After the pool incident, Aminata chose where she wanted to go with the children, which turned out to be places where wealthier people went, both Ghanaians and expats:

> After a while it was okay again, we adapted to the situation, and of course I was happy, we also went to the pool again one week later, a pool that I chose this time, I said 'Ok now listen, I gotta play the privilege card here, we go to the 5-star hotel' [...] And so we did that and that was super cool for Mia and the kids, because we could really relax there, and only Manji came with us, so we kind of took our time off there, so to say; we sat and relaxed, nothing was dangerous, he [Sofian] could just walk around, be free, like he knew from back home.

Today, Aminata can see that first pool incident with some distance, but you can feel in her voice when she recounts it that this must have been a very scary and difficult moment for her, where she feared for the life of her child. At the time of our interview, two years had passed, but the memory was still quite fresh. Aminata is fully aware that she used her privileged socioeconomic situation to get through the crisis, but feels it was the necessary step for her family to be safe. The accident happened after only a week, when being in Ghana was still all rather new. It was by spending more time together with relatives that she slowly began to trust people again.

Soon after the incident at the pool, it was time to prepare for a trip to Kumasi. Albert's mother is from a village close to Kumasi, a city in the Ashanti region to the north of Accra. As Albert's grandmother had died not long ago, the village decided to wait for Albert and his family to organise the funeral, so that Albert could be there, too. The family in Accra suggested that, as Sofian was still very small and Albert's father was not in good enough health to travel to such a remote place, that Albert go to the village and attend the funeral on his own for a few days, while Aminata, the kids and the grandfather stayed in Accra. But Aminata contested that situation vehemently.

> Silvia: Ok, why did they suggest that Albert go there alone?
> Aminata: Because they said, 'No, it is not really a place for Sofian', because Sofian was already well known to the family [laughing]… because he is such a handful ['*Pfundskerlchen*'] everyone knew Sofian's a mega active kid, you got to watch out for him. But after a while, I and also Sofian started to gain trust in the people. There was another uncle who always had him in his arms, and I saw, okay, he really has an eye on Sofian, where I can say I'm going away for a little while, to

go outside or go to do my hair and Sofian is safe. After a while I had that feeling, but I needed to get that feeling first – I mean, I didn't know these people, right?

Aminata is aware that her wish to go to the village was not rational but driven by emotion. Thinking in retrospect about insisting on going to the village with her family, she believes that rationally it would have been better to stay in Accra with health facilities close by, yet emotionally the most important thing was to stay together as a nuclear family. As long as everything was fine it was easy to feel part of the family and to feel safe. In a situation of crisis, these relations were put to the test. It was only when Aminata saw that there were relatives who took good care of her son that she started to be more relaxed again.

In the end, the whole family went to the village together, which again was full of beautiful and challenging moments. They arrived in Kumasi by bus; a taxi driver came to get them, and the ride with him was so nice. Aminata remembers what a good feeling she had and how they were all in such good spirits, passing through new landscapes she had never seen, listening to music throughout the ride, while the driver chatted with them the whole time and told them many stories about the place. Albert's family was a bit reluctant to let them stay in the village, because they thought it would not fulfil their European standards, and suggested a hostel instead:

> Aminata: After visiting that hostel, we went into the village and met yet another million relatives [...]. And then we also said, hey, this village is so much nicer than that hostel, are you kidding us? And so they showed us a little hut, more like a little house made of concrete, and there was also electricity and a small stove, a small supermarket nearby. [...] So then we finally said, 'Great we can stay here.' And then it really was such a wonderful evening, and great day, I still have some photos showing how great it was, especially the kids. Oh my god the kids were so lovely and immediately took in Mia as part of their crew.

The community in that Accra neighbourhood all originate from the same village: the hairdresser, the tailor, everyone. Aminata and her family were also able to meet these people in the village, as they all came together for the funeral event. She was very pleased to get to know so many people, and they were always very well received. The women from the village went with her to get her suitable clothes for the funeral and always made sure that her family was taken care of. Unfortunately, during the second night, Sofian got really sick, and they had to leave quickly in the morning. Sofian was already a bit better when they left the village, and the thought of returning to Accra, a place that Aminata now was familiar with, was very pleasing for her. 'It was a bit like coming home', she remarked. After getting back to Accra, Aminata said that

somehow this also welded us closer together, in that we went through this adventure together [as a nuclear family], and I was also like, 'Am I totally stupid that I did not hear what the others said?' No, it was no place to go for me with a one-year-old child. Full stop. What was I even thinking, to do that with a toddler? Other Ghanaian mothers would probably have the balls to do it, but not me. You don't have the nerve, my dear.

Many situations made Aminata realise that, although she cultivates her West African identity in Germany, she is not used to life in Ghana. And the life she led as a young child in Guinea was far from the reality she got to know in Ghana too: 'How privileged my childhood was in Guinea', Aminata reflected at the end of the interview. In Guinea she remembers she had a privileged expat life, and her father came from a wealthy urban socioeconomic milieu; he also helped to financially support a lot of his family there. In general, the experiences she had in mind from life in Guinea are connected to a wealthier lifestyle – they had a driver, were friends with other privileged expats or wealthier Guineans, and went to fancy pools. In Ghana, she learnt about a very different life, in a neighbourhood where everyone comes from the same village, living in a household with many different people, together with those who cannot afford a privileged life. So, not only was all this a new experience for Aminata because she did not know Ghana but also because she was socialised in a different socioeconomic milieu than that of her in-laws.

Acting respectable – caring and gendered division of labour

Throughout Aminata's travels, her caring duties as a mother were very much in the foreground. A lot of it was about buying and preparing food, adapting to the cooking styles and rhythm of the family in Accra, watching out for her children and organising a programme of activities for them. The caring duties did not stop at her children: Caring for her mother-in-law who had been ill for some time was also a matter of concern. For all these duties, Aminata tried to do her best to be a good member of this Ghanaian family. Respectability was important during her trip to see her family in many ways; achieving respectability in the eyes of her Ghanaian peers, especially women, was something Aminata strove for. Achieving respectability in that context meant being a good woman, wife, mother and daughter-in-law by fulfilling her care duties. It was a matter of showing that she was the same as the other women in her function as wife and mother, demonstrating that she was not that different after all. This was important in her building of social relations – as revealed in the fact that Aminata was able to bond with the women hairdressers of her neighbourhood, something she told me of with joy.

The feminist sociologist Beverley Skeggs, in her book *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable* (1997), describes the efforts of working-class women in the United Kingdom to be respectable and act respectably according to the diverse pressures they face from society and the stereotypes projected upon them. Yet respectability is a matter of concern for women in other social and economic circumstances, too. It just expresses itself a bit differently, and the pressures the women face vary. I asked Aminata how she was received by the people she met. She had told me in a previous conversation that when her mother had lived in Guinea with her father she was not well received by the female in-laws. But Aminata had very different experiences regarding her welcome – she was received very well and always treated nicely: 'Sister Aminata, sister Aminata!' they would call her. During our conversation, she stressed that one of the reasons she thought that people were always so caring and nice was that they could see that Aminata carried out her own care duties properly: 'They saw that I took care of my own children [...] I was basically spending all day caring for my children, preparing their food; I didn't let myself be served all day, I had my stuff to do, including laundry etc.' Aminata felt that this was a good basis to form solidarity among the women of the neighbourhood: They could see that she was different in many aspects, but she was also a mother who cared for her children just like them. That formed a solid basis for identification and understanding. The moments she spent with the women hairdressers in the neighbourhood, for instance, were of particular significance, as she felt she was able to connect with them through shared womanhood, although differences in status and nationality were still present. It was during her moments at the hairdresser that Aminata could chat about topics such as what it was really like to be a wife or a mother in Ghana. What it is like to be a woman there, questions about clothes, music or hairstyles – these were all topics of conversation.

But the status paradox mattered as well. Many of the questions the hairdressers had were related to how they might come to Germany and how to find success there. Aminata was conflicted. She did not want to crush their dreams and hopes, yet she also knew that for them, in their socioeconomic situations, there was no easy way to come to Germany. After returning herself, she even stayed in touch with some of them, but after a while the contact petered out.

Aminata was confronted with very material differences and immaterial desires that for some in this world are unreachable, such as travelling to Europe. For some people in this world it is just a mouse click away, while for others it is almost impossible due to structural barriers.

Community

Another key element of care was the issue of giving money to relatives, which carries with it many questions: Who is a relative, how much should each one get, how often,

what is too much, what is too little, when is it enough? There were many expectations on Aminata and Albert in this area. In Germany, they earn enough to maintain their family and lifestyle, but no more. In Ghana, relatives expected them to have a lot of money – and to be fair, by comparison they do. In Ghana they are the rich European relatives, who have to give to everyone a bit; and they feel obliged to do it, too. Aminata feels that this is a 'moral obligation' stemming from global inequity:

> Aminata: Treats here and there, and Albert – I mean he loves that and for the kids, a Coke here a Fanta there and 'Get me that but you can keep the rest.' Our toys, and everything, we rationed everything; we specifically did that, because there were always new people coming. Someone gave us that advice beforehand, who was that again?…
> Yes there was someone who said, 'You better make small portions, and don't give everything out at once.' Therefore, we always had enough for everyone. But that was also expected […]. My father had warned us about that too and had said 'I go there with a 20 (euro note). Point blank.'
> Silvia: Well it's difficult, when do you say now that's enough?
> Aminata: Well, I mean my father is himself an African who made things possible by his own efforts. But we were only born here [Germany] by coincidence; this is where the European privilege comes into play; we were just born here by chance; we did not have to struggle somewhere else to have what we have now, so it is not done with 20 euros. Then it is not morally reprehensible from my point of view for me to say 'No, I don't have more, because I also have to struggle [at home].' We did not take any money back home, we spent everything we had, that's it… And it was a lot, it was a lot a lot, but that's the way it was.

During the holidays, they were able to uphold expectations, the financial ones in particular, but as Aminata explains, towards the end they felt they had come to their financial limits. Structural injustices are being addressed here on a personal level, and that is not without conflict. Aminata also thinks about moral obligations, contrasting her experiences with those of her father, who came to Germany from Guinea in the 1970s and had to struggle to make it to Europe and to earn a decent living. He has the right to limit his financial donations, she feels, because he did not have the same privileges that she has today. Aminata was just 'lucky' to have been born in Germany, she felt she owed something for that. And giving back to her in-laws was a way to fulfil these moral debts which stem from living in an unfair world.

Albert is almost viewed as a primomigrant by his mother's home community; he was born in Germany, both his parents are Ghanaian, and his mother returned to Ghana. His link to Ghana is therefore strong. Although he has not travelled there often, he is in regular contact with his mother, and the expectations towards him among his family and peers in Ghana are high. They see him as an important provider for the whole community. Valerio Simoni has observed comparable family

obligations, in this case for international Cuban migrants living in Spain when they return to visit Cuba. Some people postpone their travel indefinitely, because they feel they cannot afford to bring enough back:

> Having to bring money and presents might weigh so much on some of my interlocutors that some of them postpone their return trip to infinity, saying that even if they have the money to buy a flight ticket they would not want to go there 'empty handed'. (Simoni, 2019)

This phenomenon of financial pressure upon those making return visits depends on two factors, one of which appears to be somewhat underrepresented in research. First, this pressure on migrants to send or bring back money exists because of significant geopolitical inequalities that the 'returnee' or diasporic visitor has to juggle – living in a country that affords a higher income (but also high living costs) and visiting a country with low incomes and salaries where they have family obligations. The second factor is the socioeconomic status of their family in the country of origin: If they belong to the working or lower middle class, it is likely that the migrant will be seen more as a 'community project' – their migration is likely to have been aided by the family, partly with the aim of improving the material conditions of those 'left behind'. If the migrant is from an upper class milieu, even if in a country where incomes are usually smaller compared to, for example, European countries, it is likely that they will not be expected to contribute financially to the same extent. The latter was the case for Lafia in Senegal, whose family is part of an upper middle class with fewer financial needs. Bringing presents or even monetary gifts was not expected from Lafia when she travelled to Senegal – very different from the situation with Aminata's in-laws in Ghana. Lafia's relatives have far fewer expectations towards her than Albert's family do towards him and his family, because Lafia is not considered as close kin. There could be two reasons for this: First, Lafia's family seems to be upper middle class and thus in no need of financial support; whereas Albert's family, although middle class but less bourgeois, has more needs, because they are less wealthy and they support many people from the mother's village, including those beyond direct kinship ties. Another reason is that Albert is far more present in the life of his mother and family in Ghana and they therefore include him more in decisions and have expectations of him. For Lafia, this inclusion in a wider kin network was only initiated after she had visited for the first time. It was only since she went that she had WhatsApp contacts, for instance, and that she began to be perceived as kin who could also help in supporting community projects – but this is still much more distant: The presents seem to be more like a symbolic gesture and not existential support, as in the case of Aminata's in-laws.

Albert helps his mother on a monthly basis. Thus, Albert holds a crucial place in the family constellation – perceived as a transnational migrant, he is seen as a

provider for the Ghanaian community, even if he already belongs to the second generation, a descendant of migrants and not a primomigrant. The need to fulfil these financial obligations is also linked to Albert and Aminata's wish to be an active part of their Ghanaian family, and in Aminata's case it is also driven by the desire to connect to her own West African origins through involvement in her in-laws' lives. By being a part of a Ghanaian family, she is able to embody the composite personality that she wishes to be and to combine being German and being West African.

Maya's situation is similar to Albert's to a certain extent. As her father moved back to Sierra Leone a few years ago, she and her brother (who still lives in the USA) are important transnational links. After moving to Nigeria towards the end of 2018, Maya went to Sierra Leone in spring 2019 for a vacation and was very impressed and happy. Maya did not want to go there for much longer than a week as there would have been family responsibilities and business she would have had to become involved in if she stayed longer. By only staying for ten days, Maya could say it was just a holiday and enjoy meeting the family and spending some time together. This is another good thing about staying in Nigeria for her; it is close but not where the family actually is. She can thus stay out of things a bit better, although she is in contact with her father weekly via phone. Like Albert, Maya is not a transnational migrant herself. Yet as she has close kin there, she is also perceived as an important part of the family and stays up to date with the everyday life of her father, grandmother, half-siblings and stepmother (her father divorced in the USA and remarried in Sierra Leone). Hence, due to the fact that her father, who was the primomigrant, has returned to Sierra Leone, Maya, a second-generation descendant born in Germany, becomes an important transnational link, as does Albert. This phenomenon has not yet received much attention in migration studies about the second generation. Usually, the challenge of meeting family obligations, especially financial ones like remittances, but other care duties as well, is only presumed an issue for the primomigrant. But what happens when the primomigrant returns, or moves elsewhere and their descendants stay put? This places the second generation in another transnational family constellation.

Living with differences in a transnational family

Anthropologist and migration scholar Constance de Gourcy (2017) explains how migration or mobility can become a resource which offers a possibility of recentring what home and belonging mean. It becomes an opportunity to experience life and living differently, even if just for a short while – and a chance to experience oneself differently. Thus, for Aminata's family, the trip to Ghana was a first step towards imagining a transnational life between Accra and Frankfurt. It was also intended to strengthen ties between kin and demonstrate a certain commitment to their Ghanaian family.

During their holidays in Ghana, it was not always easy to juggle multiple care responsibilities, and the trip was full of challenging moments for Aminata, in which she had to redefine herself and her limits, especially her limits regarding care and kinship. In Ghana, Aminata experiences a different socioeconomic status; in terms of racial identity, her skin colour and African descent matter differently there, where she and her family are perceived as *Obrunis* (foreigners or whites) but at the same time also as part of the family and community. Meanwhile, back in Germany they are racialised persons and read as non-white. In Germany they see themselves as middle class and not wealthy, whereas in Ghana this German middle-class status makes them upper class with economic and social access to a wealthy expat or wealthy Ghanaian lifestyle, as also mentioned in Maya's case in Chapter 6. This experience of geopolitical privilege is common to anyone who travels from a wealthy to a poorer country, but it plays out differently when one has family relations in that economically poorer country – there are other obligations and responsibilities for diasporic travellers. In Aminata's case, I consider this as a form of 'status paradox' that the likes of Boris Nieswand (2012) and Valerio Simoni (2019) describe for migrants and tourists: being in different countries with very different socioeconomic circumstances and having a life in both means that a person will face a paradox. In line with Nieswand's thinking, it is the paradox of being a Ghanaian migrant who in the destination country is considered to be unskilled (i.e. unable to find a job appropriate for their qualifications) while at the same time gaining status in their place of origin and facing new responsibilities there. Neither Aminata nor Albert are primomigrants, but they also face a status paradox as members of the second generation, which creates different burdens – financially and morally. Ideas of morality manifest not only through feelings of guilt and acknowledgement of privilege compared to her Ghanaian kin, but also in the form of giving considerable monetary gifts to many – gifts that will tighten links with the community in Ghana. The concept of 'status paradox' helps make sense of Aminata's experiences of socioeconomic and cultural difference in Ghana and the (inner) conflicts that result. Although the gifts of money weigh on them, they try to fulfil such demands, because they feel that the economic situation of the Ghanaian extended family is worse than their own. When I asked her if they would do certain things differently when they travelled there again, Aminata began by saying 'Well, we'd probably take less money.' But she contradicted herself in the next sentence: 'No that's not true, we'd probably always take all the money we have; if we have less, they will get less, if we have more they will get more. [...] It's not the same as in Germany, like a present that you get as an extra; it really fills a void. And everyone has to fill a void.' This is how the status paradox plays out; it is a constant re-evaluation of economic possibilities and kinship ties that take place in a transnational and economically unequal setting.

Conclusion to Part II

Being read or reading oneself as a hybrid or diasporic subject can be an uncomfortable in-between sort of location that people do not wish to inhabit, as Eleana Kim reminds us in her research on Korean transnational adoptees (2010). But it does not have to be that way. Today, as adults, the women I work with largely do not have a problem defining themselves as both German and West African. For them it is not an 'in-betweenness' or a 'neither here nor there'.

Territorially they are more attached and connected to Germany as the country they have been socialised in and where they have most of their social networks, but they nonetheless attribute an importance to their West African heritage in terms of cultural identity and everyday practices and experience. Thus, they embrace this diasporic identity to varying degrees. They come from an urban middle-class milieu where being from different cultural backgrounds is celebrated more than stigmatised. That position in society also gives them a certain economic and cultural capital. They are able to travel and are accepted as travellers/tourists everywhere with their German passports. Although African-ness is racialised in Germany, these women grew up in circles where it was marked as positive – although sometimes with a negative cast in the sense of being exoticised. They still have to live with discrimination, but they grew up knowing that it is a structural problem in society and not theirs. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 explore the different shapes that diasporic travels can take in the process of coming of age for the Afrodescendant women in this research.

Travelling to the country of one's ancestors or parents is a way to acquire or practise cultural competences. It is an important step towards embodying a diasporic identity through lived experience and practices in the places associated with one's African origins. The opportunity to live a normality that is not available to them in Germany is something that Maya, Lafia and Aminata look forward to when travelling to West Africa. The chance to go to any hairdresser, to eat West African food, listen to loud music in the street or in the backyard, get clothes made out of wax fabrics, learning some words of the local language, seeing a majority of dark-skinned instead of light-skinned people – these are all things restricted to private spaces in Frankfurt but which are part of everyday public life in Accra or Dakar. Jennifer Bidet and Lauren Wagner (2012) state that whereas the idea of returning to the place of ori-

gin is something that persists among primomigrants, the wish of reconnecting with a country/place of parental origin becomes less for the next generations of descendants and seldom goes beyond spending a holiday there. My research subjects do not fit completely with this paradigm, because they often have only one parent who migrated and this parent did not return to his/her country of origin every year, it was more sporadic; they stayed connected but not necessarily through regular travel. In this regard, the parents' generation differs from people who came to Europe as working-class labour migrants and stayed connected to their co-ethnics or nationals in the country of destination and who were thus far more closely linked to their country of origin. And yet, the desire to travel or live for an extended period in the country of parental origin, which my interlocutors only know from holidays or even sometimes not since childhood, is a relatively prominent theme for the women in my research. This is not because they think they would belong there more than in Germany, but because they feel that spending a while in the country where their parent/s grew up would represent a double gain: Living there can bring them closer to the parent in terms of understanding the cultural context s/he was socialised in and getting to know extended kin, while at the same time building a personal relationship to the territory that has remained largely foreign in their life so far.

The wish to define one's origins beyond family ties, to create a unique connection based more on personal tastes and habits is foregrounded in the travels of Lafia, Maya and Aminata – although it is not an either/or in their cases. They are very interested in getting acquainted with family and places of parental origin, but they also want to get to know the country on their own terms, also exploring it as tourists. This has been easy for Lafia, who travelled to Senegal with her husband, but almost impossible for Aminata, who travelled with her children and husband to Ghana. For Maya the situation is somewhere in between, because she went to Accra for work.

Diasporic travel and kinship

Mutuality of being in the sense used by Trémon when referring to diasporic kinship without close everyday ties is important to all three women: Maya, Aminata and Lafia. Knowing that one has family members in Sierra Leone, Senegal, Guinea and Ghana makes being of African descent in Germany more real, more palpable. Yet the mutuality of existence – in the sense of creating close kinship relations – is more difficult to achieve as it is characterised by institutional barriers, social, economic and cultural differences as well as diverse expectations.

In the three chapters comprising Part II, Lafia's example is the one that comes closest to classic roots travel – a person's first ever journey to the place they associate with their origins (ethnic or religious). Lafia had never been to Senegal before, but for many years had built up the travel project as an existential quest. The trip

was a chance for her to renegotiate her relationship with her father and with that her origins in Senegal. Her link to Senegal had played no role in her everyday life in Germany. By comparison, Maya and Aminata had already had opportunities to build their Sierra Leonean and Guinean heritage into their understandings of self.

For Lafia, many things were new in Senegal, especially meeting her Senegalese kin; So the basis for potentially creating a mutuality of existence with her Senegalese family was created by means of her travel. While Maya and Aminata's trips to Nigeria and Ghana were a way to practise and re-encounter the West African culture they had known from their fathers and family, Lafia's journey to Senegal was a means to familiarise herself with a way of life she had not known so far. And as it was her first time there, she got to know the family but was not included in decision-making processes in the way Aminata and Maya are on account of their ongoing transnational kin relations. Indeed, Aminata and her husband are included in a network of family obligations and must contribute to the wellbeing of Albert's family in Ghana. Lafia, on the other hand, could include more tourist elements in her travels, though part of its rationale was also about meeting kin. Lafia's trip to Senegal a few years ago opened up possibilities to create kinship ties; how that will continue is open ended. In the cases of Aminata's Ghanaian in-laws and Maya's family in Sierra Leone, they built continuous links sustained through ongoing communication and occasional visits (although travel could be difficult for financial or security reasons). Kinship ties are created through an everyday practice of transnational family communication. For both women, travelling to West Africa – Aminata for a family holiday and Maya for a work placement – was also diasporic travel that they had long anticipated. For Maya, living in a West African country, if not Sierra Leone then another close by, had been a wish of hers for many years, and she conceived of it as a way to live up to the person she wanted to be – someone who knows about her African origins and understands the reality of life in an African country. For her and her husband, Nigeria was the best of both worlds: They were able to find good jobs and retain the comforts and safety they were used to in Germany, while also being able to get to know a West African way of life. For all three, travelling to West Africa was also a reality check in which imagination and expectations met the complexity of reality.

How class travels: experiencing a 'status paradox'

Becoming aware of one's privilege when travelling is a process my participants have all had to cope with, given that they all come from a wealthy European country. Yet they have also had to deal with how a new environment can be the ground for experiencing shifting social positions in terms of racial identity, for instance. Maya B., Aminata Camara and Lafia T. see their socioeconomic situation in global terms, acknowledging that compared to other countries – such as the countries of origin of

their parents or partners – they are wealthy and considered as such by their transnational kin.

Nieswand (2012) argues that transnational migrants, especially those who migrate from countries of the Global South to the North, have multiple and incongruent class positions in the different nation-states where they live. The social and cultural tensions experienced by my research participants when they travel to visit kin include class negotiation processes which often take place within wider kinship circles. The need to give presents and gifts of money and the expectation that they will help extended kin come to Germany is something Aminata, and to a lesser extent also Maya, confronted in Ghana or Sierra Leone on a regular basis. Aminata knows that although she is not at all wealthy in German terms, she is by Ghanaian standards or in the context of her family there.

Practising cultural skills during diasporic travels

Nonetheless, these journeys do offer Maya, Lafia and Aminata an opportunity to experience, explore and practise parts of themselves differently. For all three of my interlocutors, this aspect of their travel was the most rewarding – getting to know another way of life with new food and everyday rituals which bring them closer to their self-image and their personal African heritages. Through their travels, Lafia, Maya and Aminata became connected to lived reality in Senegal, Nigeria and Ghana, allowing them to see and feel how their families and people in general live in these countries. Today they try to bring some of that experience back to life in Frankfurt by cooking Ghanaian or Senegalese dishes, listening to music or wearing the clothes they got themselves tailored – or simply by remembering a certain mood. The material and immaterial souvenirs they brought back are what tourism scholars Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard describe as 'signs of self', 'objects of memory' and 'objects of transition and trajectory' (2005). They underline an aspect of these individuals' self-fashioning, reminding Lafia, Maya and Aminata that they have been there and of the possibility of bringing new meaning to their lives in Frankfurt.

So far, through their stories and travels, we have followed Aminata, her father and two other friends from Frankfurt, Maya and Lafia, in their coming-of-age processes as people of African descent in Germany. In the final part of the thesis, we will turn to another topic and deal in depth with the world of Black German activism and the role of life storytelling as community-building practice. We will meet two new individuals: Oxana and Layla, a couple engaged in Black and feminist activism. Travelling is also important as a diasporic practice in their lives, but with a focus on connecting to Black and feminist activists globally.

PART III: DIASPORIC ACTIVISM

For the women in my research, the practice of travelling reveals itself as vital for the ability to embody diasporic identity. Travel is not only essential to enable the building of transnational kinship networks and for practising cultural skills, it is also crucial for building global Black political communities and Black sisterhoods. This will be the topic of the last two chapters, which comprise Part III of this book.

Part I discussed more local and national aspects of activism. In the cases of Aminata and Lamine Camara, their activism was heavily focused either on Germany or Guinea – only their online activities had a broader reach. In this part, I focus on the global scale of Black activism by following the lives of two Afro-feminist performers who travel around the world to connect with activists and create community. Chapters 9 and 10 explore how such activities and the narratives they promulgate are used to create Black activist selves and communities.

In this final section, we come full circle, returning to the Afroeuropeans conference. I opened the book by describing the performance of life stories at the 2019 Lisbon iteration of this event. In this section, I will introduce two new women, and we will indeed return to the Afroeuropeans conference – but this time to the one that took place in Finland in 2017. It was here that I met the Afro-feminist performer couple Oxana Chi and Layla Zami, with whom I have travelled to several events and conferences in the subsequent years. By tracing Oxana and Layla's lives and work, I aim to reveal the importance of life-story sharing as a community-building tool for Black scholars and activists worldwide – it is fundamental in the making of Black sisterhood. In addition to following the two performers, I also examine the function of life storytelling in the making of the Afro-German movement in the 1980s and how famous Black activists such as Audre Lorde (USA), Ika Hügel-Marshall and May Ayim (both Germany) made use of it in their writings and teachings. The narration of personal life experiences in the form of autobiographical writings, and within this the description of an individual's quest for Black and African roots, has played a key part in the construction of Afro-German political movements since the 1980s. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in 2017/18 and from biographical interviews with Oxana and Layla, this section argues that the act of life storytelling – whether during day-to-day conversations or as speakers and performers at public events– is

a way to construct a sense of self as part of a global community of Afro-feminist activists. The narration of individual life experience becomes a form of political activist expression and a source of empowerment for an Afrodiasporic and feminist understanding of self. As diverse life stories circulate in the world (in text, sound, video or in vivo) they create and enable a transnational dialogue. Personal stories become a tool for political agency, a method to transform private into public meaning and a way to build community.

9. Life storytelling as Black and feminist political practice

As forms of artistic expression, storytelling and music making were means of communal liberation for African Americans: This cultural production was a way to bring and to write oneself into being, as for a long time the stories of African Americans were stories untold. It was a way to create agency as a marginalised group (Jackson 2013). Artistic expression and narration of one's own life is, according to Paul Gilroy (1993), intrinsic to the political liberation struggle of African Americans in the USA. Today, the sharing of one's personal story, sharing of experiences of racism and of strategies to cope with forms of discrimination and marginalisation have become an important tool to develop Black political communities worldwide.

In this chapter, I show how the practice of artistic expression of one's life emerged in African American cultural production and how it travelled to Germany to influence the emergence of the Afro-German movement of the 1980s. It is especially the practice of life storytelling which has been taken up by Afro-German activists through the influence of Audre Lorde, a Black feminist poet and academic from the USA.

Artistic expression is employed widely as a strategy for waging political struggle in Black German movements; life stories make up major narrative elements in the productions of contemporary Black activists and artists. Recently, for example, Natasha Kelly, a university lecturer, Afro-German activist and film-maker created *Milli's Awakening: Black Women, Art and Resistance* (2018),[1] in which Black female artists of different ages talk about their lives in Germany. Kelly and the other women who feature in the film use art in order to make a political statement and to connect with each other.

I adhere to the premise that art is vitally important for circulating political messages in the world and for creating global Black communities. These artistic expressions have to be seen as a means to an end: They are instruments to transport testimony and make it available to a wider public. Such personal testimonies are a promi-

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1   For an overview of Natasha Kelly's work, see her website: https://www.natashaakelly.com/arts (accessed 21 November 2020).

nent tool for mediating the experiences of marginalised people. They are frequently used, for example, in human rights advocacy – often as the only evidence survivors of violence can put forward (Patel 2012). They are also a very prominent tool for political activism in general, as the #metoo movement has demonstrated. Within this movement, the accumulation of online and real-life personal testimonies is seen as one of the most important ways of dismantling sexism and giving women the courage to speak up (Brunner & Partlow-Lefevre 2020).

Girloy's book, besides showing the importance of travel and mobility for the development of African American intellectual production, explores the uniqueness of Black American culture and how it makes sense to speak of a shared culture for African Americans based on their historical experience of slavery in the USA. This derives from the shared conditions and the overcoming of slavery, the struggle for liberation from oppression and the urge to tell the world about it so that it cannot be forgotten, and the need to build strong communities for survival. The histories of Afrodescendant people in Germany have much less in common, as there was never a single period when many Africans or Afrodiasporic people immigrated. Rather, they arrived at many different times and from a highly diverse variety of countries and social backgrounds, and never in very high numbers (see Chapter 2 for a history of the African diaspora in Germany). Yet common denominators can still be found, for instance in shared experiences of racism and the experience of living in a society where white people are a dominant majority and Afrodescendant people are still exoticised.

Origins and themes of life stories in Black movements

The importance of life stories for African diaspora movements dates back to the documentation of slave narratives. I was not aware when I started my research that documenting life stories or narratives was a highly sensitive matter. I knew, of course, about the ethics of representation, but personal biography is much more a political matter in Black political movements than elsewhere, because telling one's story is perceived as a political act of emancipation and part of the struggle against marginalisation. It is about controlling and having power over one's own narrative. That issue is highlighted by Robert Stepto (1979) when analysing the production of slave testimonies in his book *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*. The first slave narratives were written and edited by white people that 'advocated' for their authenticity, for the veracity of the narrative. It is only later that Black authors took control over the whole process of publishing their own stories. To date the most famous is still the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, 1845* (1968). Life story recording became widespread through the Federal Writers Project (1936–38) in the USA, which was ini-

tiated as part of the United States Work Progress Administration during the Great Depression and as part of which 2,300 life-histories of people who had been born into slavery were collected in seventeen different US states.[2] Otherwise nothing would remain to remember slavery besides the materiality of the estates of slave-holders. Personal testimonies thus became a crucial source of evidence. The were a way to afford the people who had been forced to suffer some agency, to give them a voice and make them part of history. Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright were among the famous writers who collected these narratives. For Gilroy (1993), African diaspora or Blackness in the USA and the Caribbean was created through shared experiences of displacement and racial terror. Common cultural practices evolved through these shared experiences of the 'middle passage' (the Transatlantic slave trade). Gilroy explores the practices of diaspora as community-making processes and the importance of creating shared narratives. For the African diaspora of the Black Atlantic (USA and Caribbean), it is thus the experience of death and suffering that generated specific forms of cultural expression. Regarding the themes of these Black narratives, Gilroy draws the connection between storytelling and religion:

> They were, of course, initially stories taken from the Bible. Stories of slavery and escape from bondage blasted out of their former place in the continuum of history by Africans and then re-accentuated as an integral part of their struggles in the West. Both storytelling and music-making contributed to an alternative public sphere […]. (1993, p. 200)

Only mentioned briefly by Gilroy is the role of the church for the Black population in former slave states of the American South, which I believe is crucial for understanding the quest for liberation – and the anti-racism struggles of Black organisations and movements today. In the face of the experience of slavery and 'racial terror' (Gilroy 1993, p. 129) in the USA, the role of the church was to provide a narrative of healing – from the wounds caused by centuries of slave labour and racist discrimination. It was also the institution to keep the memory of that time alive, through the people's narratives. Suffering, redemption and healing are common themes in Christianism and Judaism, and they accrued another very non-metaphorical meaning for African American people from the American South, who personally suffered or were descendants of those who suffered as slaves. The narrative strands used in sermons in African Methodist/Black churches in the South of the USA are still valid for Black movements today, where life stories include themes such as suffering, healing and exile. Steve Gadet (2015), Senior lecturer in American Studies at the

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2   For more information on the project 'Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936–1938', visit https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/ (accessed 6 April 2020).

Université des Antilles, writes about the birth of the Black church during slavery and how it became a social movement and a safe space for freedom of expression for African American slaves. The church became also a place for organising politically, for creating a common voice and a common agenda as African Americans. The first African Baptist church was officially recognised in Georgia in 1788, founded by a liberated slave, Andrew Bryan. It was during the American Revolution (1776–1783) that a movement for independent Black churches emerged, for the expression of faith for African Americans who were tired of being relegated to the back pews in biracial churches. From the outset, the African Baptist church was attached to a Black liberation struggle and would provide a strong intellectual basis for Black movements to come (Gadet 2015).

Alongside suffering, redemption and healing, the Black Power and Civil Rights movements have also emphasised narratives and practices of self-care. The 'self' takes on a double meaning here, referring to the African American community as well as to each singular individual. The Black Panthers transformed the health aspect of self-care into a programme of political action, pointing to the correlation of poor health with social and economic discrimination against the Black population. Caring for oneself and others became a form of political resistance in the face of structural injustice against Black people; it was also very prominent in women's movements within the Civil Rights struggle (Sheber 2018). The efforts of the Black and Civil Rights movements in the USA reverberated transnationally, too, and pointed to the connections between health, wellbeing and anti-racism work, as Hobart and Kneese (2020) indicate in their *Social Text* special issue on 'radical care':

> During the women's movement and civil rights era of the 1960s and 1970s, physical health became central to maintaining community resiliency against racism, sexism, colonialism, classism, and homophobia. (p. 6)

These themes, originating from Black churches and then the Civil Rights campaigns and the women's movement – of suffering, redemption, liberation, community organisation and (health)care – have found their way into life-story writing in Afro-German movements, too.

The Afro-German movement in the 1980s

The Afro-German movement of the 1980s was strongly influenced by feminist activists and scholars and attracted many women of African descent. The importance of telling one's story in the Afro-German movement was inspired by Audre Lorde in Berlin. Lorde came to live and teach in Berlin in 1984. She had been invited by Dagmar Schultz, a German feminist scholar who had lived and taught in the USA, which

is also where the two had met. Schultz was the life partner of Ika Hügel-Marshall, whose important autobiography I discuss further below.

During Lorde's time as a lecturer at the Freie Universität Berlin, where she taught classes in Minority Women's Literature, she incited Afrodescendant women and men in her class to talk with each other about their lives. Two years later, this resulted in the publication of *Showing Our Colours: Afro-German Women Speak Out* (Oguntoye et al. 1986). For Lorde, the child of Caribbean immigrants in the USA, this practice of life-writing represented a way to inscribe oneself in history as a marginalised person, a form of emancipation as a racialised woman, facilitating the formation of a collective identity as Black women (Lorde 2012). She suggested that it was important to tell the stories of people of African descent as they were untold in the German public realm, where Black people seemed to be perceived as eternal strangers. In order to forge a place for them in Germany, Lorde suggested they tell each other about their lives and write down the stories. This was the beginning of the writing of African-German history, and was based on the assumption that no one else would do it for them (Piesche 2012).

Audre Lorde (1934–1992) was an Afro-Caribbean author, poet and Black lesbian feminist activist from the USA who had been very active in the Civil Rights and Black Power movement. She was among the first feminists in the USA to include intersectionality in her work, addressing the issue of intersecting categories of discrimination and marginalisation such as gender, race/ethnicity and class, often by using her own biography as an example (Lorde 1983). She wrote about her life as a Black Lesbian woman and feminist in the USA who originated from a working-class family, and about the power of organising with other women across differences but with the acknowledgement of intersectionality and asymmetries of power within women's movements in the USA and beyond (*Sister Outsider*, 1984); about her life with cancer and how her loved ones helped her in these difficult times (*Cancer Journals*, 1980); about feminist and Black activist forms of resistance (*A Burst of Light*, 1988); and she wrote her autobiography in a new genre she called biomythography, combining history, biography and mythology in *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name* (1983). In her autobiography, Lorde talks about her growing up in Harlem, about how important education was for her parents, about experiences of racism and ableism (she was sight impaired as a child), her evolution towards politicisation in Black and feminist movements, as well as dealing with her Caribbean heritage through memories of her mother. Lorde explains that 'Zami', the name she chooses for herself, comes from Carriacou mythology and means 'women who work together as friends and lovers' (1993, p. 255); Carriacou is the island of origin of her mother. Themes of overcoming suffering through solidarity and care and the search for Afrodiasporic origins are important in her work. She often uses personal stories to contextualise larger themes, thus underlining the importance of body and embodiment for the work of

an anti-racist and feminist activist; she valued personal narratives as political tool of resistance.

Many of the co-editors and writers of the book *Showing Our Colours* (*Farbe bekennen* [1986]) were of mixed German and Afrodescendant heritage, such as May Ayim, who was of German-Ghanaian heritage; Ika Hügel-Marshall, who had German and African American heritage, and Katharina Oguntoye, a woman of Nigerian-German descent. All three of these women were Afro-German activists of the first hour and had attended Lorde's classes. Ayim wrote her Master's thesis in pedagogy about the history of Afro-Germans. It became part of the basis for the book *Showing Our Colours.* Ayim was very active and soon became an icon for the Afro-German movement. She wrote poetry and essays about her life and the political situation in Germany for people of African descent and was tireless in her work for anti-racist organisations (Ayim 1995, 1997).

This foundational text, *Showing Our Colours*, is divided into four sections: 'Racism, sexism and pre-colonial representations of Africa in Germany', 'Africans and Afro-Germans in the Weimar Republic and in Nazi Germany', 'Afro-Germans after 1945 – the so-called occupation children', and 'Racism here and today'. It is essentially a collection of life-narratives in which Afro-German women of different generations came together to relate their life stories as Germans of African descent, beginning with the daughters of Mandenga Diek and Gottlieb Kala Kinger, two Cameroon natives who arrived in Germany before 1914 during German colonialism. It was also through the intellectual and editorial work of the authors and their project on the history of Africans and Afrodiasporic people in Germany that the organisations Initiative for Black People in Germany (*Initiative Schwarze Deutsche* [ISD]) and Afro-German Women (*Afro-Deutsche Frauen* [ADEFRA] were founded in 1986. The main goal of the ISD, according to Tahir Della, its current director, is the historical revision of Black history in Germany (Kazeem 2013). At first, the ISD was a small organisation with a few members in Berlin and Frankfurt, but it soon started to establish local branches in other cities, too. Now there are several regional branches and an umbrella organisation at the national level, most of which are run by volunteers. It supports arts and educational projects that are directed at the empowerment of people of African descent, organising exhibitions and doing political lobbying in Germany on themes related to anti-racism. It also collaborates regularly with other German and European Black political organisations.

Since its beginnings, the ISD has organised annual meetings of its members, and these events have become important intergenerational gatherings. The ISD describes itself as a non-profit organisation that represents the interests of Black people in Germany; in its mission statement on its website, it names some of its objectives as the hope of promoting a more positive Black identity ('*Wir bieten eine positive Identitätsfindung*'), Black consciousness ('*Wir fördern ein Schwarzes Bewusstsein*') and standing for anti-racist attitudes in all areas of society ('*Wir treten für eine anti-rassis-*

tische Haltung in allen gesellschaftlichen Bereichen ein'). In the publication that marked the organisation's 30th anniversary (2016), there is an explanation of the two words Afro-German (*Afrodeutsch*) and Black (*Schwarz*). The ISD stresses that there is a plurality of understandings of Afro-German identity and that Blackness is a cultural construct based on shared experiences of racialisation and not a simple description of someone with a brown skin tone:

> Afro-German: A self-description used by many Black people in Germany. It was inspired by the term 'Afro-American' and connects aspects of African-diasporic origin with a belonging to German society.
>
> Black: A non-discriminatory self-designation. It marks certain common experiences and life realities in a society dominated by whiteness. In its political sense, Black is written with a capital B, in order to illustrate that it describes a constructed category rather than a real 'characteristic' that can be related to a skin tone.
>
> (Ridha et al. 2016, pp. 12ff)

The terms 'Black' and 'Afro-German' were introduced to Germany through the US Black Power movement and by scholars such as Audre Lorde. They are widely used today in Germany in the context of political activism undertaken by Germans of African descent, but they are not common self-designations for the majority of Afrodescendant people in Germany. This was mentioned briefly above in the case of Lamine Camara, who would not refer to himself as 'Black'. It is not a category that he embraces; he is not attached to the idea of solidarity between all people of African descent in the same way as his daughter. People who self-identify as 'Black' in Germany today have often been in touch with Black activist resources or have been included in politically activist circles themselves at a certain point in their lives. The editors of *Showing Our Colours* were all members of the ISD – some younger, some older – and many of them were also part of ADEFRA. ADEFRA was founded as a women-only organisation, inspired by discussions in the classes of Audre Lorde at the Freie Universität in Berlin. A group of Afrodescendant and feminist women organised get-togethers and there followed the idea of a safe space for Black women in Germany. Out of these gatherings, the organisation was created, open to all interested women of African descent whether students or not – and it still exists today. Most of its members had an academic background and studied subjects such as educational sciences or sociology. ADEFRA and the ISD were intended to complement each other. Since 1986, members of these organisations have contributed a great deal to scholarship on 'Black Germany' (e.g. Katharina Oguntoye, Peggy Piesche, Manuela Ritz, May Ayim). Much of their work was published by the Orlanda publishing house, co-founded by Dagmar Schultz in 1974. Schultz, a feminist historian and sociologist, had invited Audre Lorde to Berlin in 1984, after studying

literature, filmmaking and sociology in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s where she became acquainted with an intersectional approach as well as with Black feminism – themes that were not discussed yet in Germany and let alone forming part of any university courses.

Many Afro-German authors and activists describe meetings of Germans of African descent, autobiographical writings and the sharing of life stories as strategies to fight against a feeling of isolation and exclusion while growing up in Germany (Ridha et al. 2016, Hügel-Marshall 1998). Since its beginnings in the 1980s, the Afro-German movement has had an agenda to raise awareness of the presence of Black people in the history of Germany and to highlight racial discrimination and prejudices against Black people in Germany. Ika Hügel-Marshall and May Ayim, two of the founding figures of the feminist Afro-German movement, both wrote autobiographical essays or books where – inspired by Audre Lorde – they describe what it was like to grow up in Germany after World War II (Hügel-Marshall) and in the 1960s and 70s (Ayim), how they found relief in Black and feminist collectives and how they searched for their Afrodiasporic origins.

In both Hügel-Marshall's and Ayim's autobiographical writings there are common threads with the life stories of other Black artists/activists (for example the one that I present in the introduction, Tiffany López Ganet from Spain): experiences of growing up or going to school as the only Afrodescendant, experiences of racism or racialisation (although in very diverse forms, ranging from exoticisation to physical violence), finding relief in community with other people of African descent in one's home country/town and, finally, dealing with personal African or Afrodiasporic family heritage including through roots travel. Although the three women were born in different times (1947, 1960, 1990) what unites them is their leaning towards Black political activism and anti-racism, and the use of life storytelling as political act in their work.

Ika Hügel-Marshall

In her autobiography *Invisible Woman: Growing up Black in Germany* (1998, 2008), Hügel-Marshall writes about her childhood in the immediate aftermath of World War II and the stigma of her status as an 'occupation child' that she and her family had to face.[3] Ika was born in a village in Bavaria in 1947 as the daughter of a white German Bavarian mother and an African American GI father, who had to leave Germany due to illness before she was born, without knowing about her existence.

At the age of seven, her mother placed Ika in a children's home, a practice that was encouraged by the German state to educate 'occupation children' (1998, p. 10) – which was what most children of African or African American descent were referred

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3   Part of this section has been published in the French journal *Ethnographiques*: https://www.ethnographiques.org/2019/Wojczewski (accessed 30. April 2024) (Wojczewski 2019).

to at the time. The mothers were often stigmatised for having been in a relationship with an American soldier after World War II.

They were doubly stigmatised when the father was an African American, because not only did they have a relation with the occupier but also with a Black person – a reaction that again demonstrates the enduring racism against people of African descent. A newspaper article published in the 1950s that Hügel-Marshall cites in her book reports a speech in the Bundestag in which these 'mixed' children were referred to as a 'special human and racial problem' (1998, p. 12). Hügel-Marshall's case was no exception: Many children of both African American and African descent were put up for adoption after the war or grew up in orphanages, homes or foster families in Germany or the USA (African American families adopted many) between 1945 and 1960. Around 4,000 children with African American fathers and German mothers were put up for adoption or placed in homes, often forcefully separated from their biological parents, because the soldiers were called back home or the military hierarchy refused to authorise the marriage (where racial segregation was officially ongoing) (Lee 2011, Lemke Muniz de Faria 2003, Aitken & Rosenhaft 2015). From early school age, Hügel-Marshall had experiences of being treated badly by schoolmates and teachers because of her skin colour, but she also forged friendships and was often respected by the other children.

Hügel-Marshall goes on to describe her path towards political activism. After training as a childcare worker, she moved to Frankfurt as a young adult. She explained this by stating that she wanted to leave the small town to immerse herself in a bigger city where her skin colour would not matter. She decided to study pedagogy in Frankfurt, one of the hubs of the 1968 student revolt. Before becoming active in Afro-German movements, she had already become engaged in feminist organisations and lived in a shared feminist flat where they often discussed politics. It was only in 1986, at the age of 39, that she went to her first Afro-German meeting, held by a local ISD group. What created a feeling of community here, she writes, was the shared experience of racism that people of African descent were facing in Germany. In her book, Hügel-Marshall describes how by connecting with people like herself, she was able for the first time to forge a self-confident form of belonging in Germany, because she could identify with other Afro-Germans. The final and longest part of her book is dedicated to her father and her uncertain origins, which she started to explore when she was already involved in Black movements. She describes how she finally got to know her father and his family in the USA when she was already in her forties, how she took his name and American nationality. She also dedicates a part of her book to her friendship with Lorde, who had lived with her and Dagmar Schultz in Berlin.

Throughout her autobiography, it is clear that Hügel-Marshall is writing in her role as Black German activist, where the telling of one's story is an important act of empowerment and solidarity – 'an act of public recognition' for marginalised groups

in a society, as anthropologist Michael Jackson (2013, p. 32) describes the political motivation of storytelling. Her book relates how the experience of being racialised in a society can be dealt with productively by finding community, a theme that recurs in many other accounts of Black identity.

May Ayim

May Ayim (born 3 May 1960 in Hamburg, died 9 August 1996 in Berlin) is the pen name of May Opitz, co-founder of the Afro-German organisations ISD and ADE-FRA in 1986 and an anti-racist and feminist activist, researcher, speech therapist and poet. The child of a German woman from Hamburg and Ghanaian medical student Emanuel Ayim, who came to Germany in the 1950s, she was sent to a children's home when she was born. Her biological father wanted to take her with him to Ghana, but German law would not allow that at the time (Ayim 1997, p. 13). She was adopted by a white German family – the Opitzes – in Münster when she was two years old and grew up with her adoptive parents and three brothers and sisters. Ayim wrote many autobiographical poems and essays published, for instance, in her posthumous *Grenzenlos und unverschämt* (1997a).

Much like Hügel-Marshall, Ayim recounts experiences of racism and racialisation (though less brutal than Hügel-Marshall faced). She also describes growing up in a family that did not know how to deal with racism and could not protect her from it, as well as her path towards political activism and dealing with her Ghanaian heritage. May's adoptive family had a working-class background. Her parents wanted her to have a good education in order to be able to 'take a job where her skin colour would not matter and where she could possibly also work in Africa' (Ayim 1997, p. 78). Ayim remembered later in her life that her family frequently told her to try to keep a low profile, as her dark skin tone and curly hair already attracted 'too much attention'. However, they encouraged contact with her biological father, Emanuel Ayim, and she would meet him from time to time before he left Germany. Her career as a feminist and Black activist started when she attended the First Congress for Foreign and German Women (*Erster Kongreß der ausländischen und deutschen Frauen*) in Frankfurt in 1984. In a letter to the organisers, she wrote that she had never been to a women's congress before, and began to tell her life story: She left her adoptive family following a fight after her final school exams and did not have any contact with them for a few years. Then she went on to write what it meant for her to have both dark skin and a German passport:

> Physical appearance normally shouldn't be important. Yet what this only apparent incompatibility of skin colour and nationality signifies for me in my search for identity, having grown up in a society in which physical appearance is so important, I became aware of in particular this weekend: My socialisation was one of a 'German' girl in the midst of a German environment (my family had and has

no contact with foreigners). I have a German name and 'enjoy' the privileges of a German 'national' with my German passport. I do not speak any African language, have never been to the native country of my father – in short, I am not a foreigner. I find it unnecessary to emphasise my 'Germanness'. But when, once again, people ask me about my country of origin, and I answer: 'I was born and raised in Germany', people seldom accept that answer. (1997, p. 10)

In this extract, Ayim talks about her experience of othering and racialisation. Having a brown skin tone often meant not being accepted as German. This is still an issue today. Although German society has become far more culturally diverse since the 1950s, my interlocutors still have to answer the same questions as May Ayim or Ika Hügel-Marshall. Ayim recounts the questions and comments she got after telling people about her German nationality: 'But you cannot deny blood', or 'But do you not want to go back home later?' or 'But you look so different' (1997, p. 10). Another prominent activist and researcher from the Afro-German movement, Katharina Oguntoye, puts it like this in *Showing Our Colours*: 'As we are not perceived as European, a feeling of being different develops in us' (Oguntoye et al. 1992, p. 20). Ayim explains racist behaviour towards and stereotypes of Black and African people in Germany: She too, while socialised in Germany, had learned how African people were negatively portrayed since childhood – in songs, stories and carnival costumes. Many of the questions above have now become emblematic in confronting racism in Germany and are often taken up by anti-racism activists or People of Colour to explain experiences of everyday racism.

Ayim wrote her Master's thesis in pedagogy on Afro-German cultural and social history. She moved to Berlin in 1984 and described the city as her 'home [...] more than anywhere else' (Ayim 1997, p. 89). But another aspect of her work is dedicated to her relationship to Ghana and journeys to other countries such as Brazil and South Africa, which helped her deal positively with her African origins when she was in her twenties. Her poem 'Zwischen Avenui und Kreuzberg' (published in the posthumous volume *Nachtgesang* by Orlanda Frauenverlag in 1997) is about her encounter and later ongoing relationship with her grandfather and the native village of her father, where she travelled in 1986. Many of Ayim's books and anthologies were published by Orlanda – a feminist press founded by Dagmar Schultz in 1974. This publisher is still an important voice for Afro-German authors and feminist literature in general.

Both Hügel-Marshall and Ayim combine an intellectual project on Black and African history in Germany with a more existential project of finding out about their own specific family history. This aspect of discovering one's unknown family past is still an important task for ISD, which tries to help find unknown family members for Germans of African or African American descent. Ayim and Hügel-Marshall were

been inspired in this regard by the example of Audre Lorde as an individual as well as by her writing style and the themes she explores.

Here we may observe the two uses that Paul Ricœur suggests for the concept of identity: *'l'identité comme mêmeté et l'identité comme soi'* (identity as sameness and identity as self) (1988, p. 296). In the life narratives of Hügel-Marshall and Ayim, we find elements of identification with a group, in this case with a community of Black feminists. Both life stories describe certain experiences – for example, being confronted with racism in Germany and learning how to protect oneself from it by being part of a Black collective. They also show the importance of transnational mobility for the perception of self; travelling both within Germany and beyond national boundaries is a strategy that Hügel-Marshall and Ayim use to fill an existential void and to search for belonging to a transnational community. Both built an identity as Black activists by sharing their experiences with other Afrodescendant people, and by becoming members of anti-racist and feminist movements as well as by getting to know their respective biological families. Yet the act of telling can be also considered an act of identity-making as self-fashioning; it is through the narration itself that a permanent identity is created, in the cases of these two figures, a permanent and coherent self as an Afro-German feminist (Wojczewski 2019).

Connecting lives through stories

Life storytelling and sharing not only has the potential to cross geographical boundaries to create community but also connects different generations. This has been an important cultural and political practice for African Americans since plantation slavery. First, it created a community of existence in the USA through writing and storying oneself into history. Then the practice became important all over the world for Black political communities. In Germany it gained significance in the Afro-German movement from the 1980s through the influence of Afro-feminist poet Audre Lorde. Getting together and telling each other about one's lives was at the foundation of Afro-German organisations such as ISD and ADEFRA. Becoming acquainted with Black intellectual scholarship can lead to a re-storying of self. This process can be witnessed in the writings of Ika Hügel-Marshall and May Ayim. W h i l e the two women did not feel they belonged to a community, alignment with Afro-feminist movements and the practice of narrating experiences in the form of autobiographical writing led them to create coherent selves. Their life and travel experiences are what philosopher Paul Ricœur calls 'narrative interpretation of identity'[4] (1988). Writing helped them create self-identities with a permanence in time while also taking account of the changes that happen in a life.

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4   *L'interprétation narrative de l'identité.*

But life storytelling is not limited by national boundaries. As I described at the very beginning of the book, in the fieldnote about the 2019 Afroeuropeans conference in Lisbon and the Black activist Tiffany López Ganet, life storytelling and sharing has the power to connect Afrodescendant activists all over the world through its focus on specific themes. The sharing of these intimate stories allows for a construction of global Black brotherhoods and sisterhoods that stand in solidarity as they create resonant points of identification.

10. Oxana Chi and Layla Zami: Connecting to global Blackness on the move

Figure 8: 'Les mariées', 2019 © Christophe Schwartz

Life stories in the form of written accounts such as autobiographies or autobiographical essays, or in films or music are important. But life stories also unfold on the level of the everyday and are tightly linked to the performance of self. In this chapter, I examine life storytelling from a more everyday perspective – following the lives of two Afro-German feminist performers, a couple whose lives are shaped by the travelling in order to connect to Black and feminist activists and artists worldwide. The chapter centres on the narration of self in daily life and the use of virtual spaces, conferences and events for connecting with others.

Following Oxana Chi's and Layla Zami's lives and practices reveals the intimate connection between embodiment and activism. In order to be a Black and queer feminist activist, I argue, one needs to embody certain political ideals, especially because in anti-racist and feminist work the body is crucial as both a site of violence and repression and as a symbol of resistance. 'Women's bodies were central to the articulation of political dissent' affirms Wendy Parkins (2000, p. 59) in her study of the British suffragette movement; while the anthropologist Barbara Sutton (2010) explores the importance of the body in women's rights protests in Argentina where *poner el cuerpo*, 'to put one's body', has become a slogan for activists:

> The notion of poner el cuerpo has some overlaps with 'to put the body on the line' and to 'give the body' but […] it transcends both notions. With respect to political agency, poner el cuerpo means not just to talk, think, or desire, but to be really present and involved; to put the whole (embodied) being into action, to be committed to a social cause. (p. 161)

Oxana and Layla are good examples of 'embodied activists' who put their bodies into action in order to transmit political ideals which transcend their private and professional lives. Political activism is important for their subjectivity, and their bodies are a tool of resistance – especially in their artistic expression. Oxana deploys dance to express her political ideals and affiliations; Layla uses her voice as a researcher and poet, and her breath as a saxophonist. Feminist and Black solidarity are also inherent in their relations to each other, standing side by side in mutual care and support, as together they work, live and perform the ideal of Black queer love.

Meeting Oxana Chi and Layla Zami, two Afro-feminist performers

This was my first conference that was also a site for fieldwork: the Afroeuropeans conference in Tampere, July 2017. I thought about it as a rite of passage, because it would be the first time that I would present my research on transnational mobility and Germans of African descent to an audience that was personally and professionally involved in constructions of Black identities in Europe, with a majority of participants being Afrodescendant themselves. One of the first talks I attend in the big halls of Tampere University is a lecture-performance by Oxana Chi and Layla Zami, part of a panel organised by Natasha Kelly, a sociologist interested in colonialism and feminism and an Afro-German activist herself. After their lecture-performance, in which Layla lectures and Oxana performs, I go up and talk to them. I congratulate Oxana, and she tells me that she once met Angela Davis in New York and that her performance is about that encounter. 'The time she spent in jail', Oxana explains, 'that marked her, it shook her, you could feel that when you saw her, there was a fear, although it is so long ago, and today she is a famous researcher and activist.'

She has tried to translate this encounter and history into her performance. I first talk to Layla about my research, and she seems interested. I get straight to the point and ask her: 'Maybe I can come see you at a performance when you travel somewhere or travel with you?' And Layla says, 'Well yes why not, I will talk about it with Oxana; it would be great, if you get funding for that it'll be great!' I tell her that funding is not a problem and that I actually have it already. After Oxana agrees as well, I tell them that I will contact them for further details. Then they show me a DVD 'Dancing through Gardens' which they have brought to the conference. It is about Oxana dealing artistically with the biography of a famous dancer from 1920s Germany, Tatjana Barbakoff, who was murdered in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. (Fieldnote, Tampere, 4 July 2017)

In one sequence of the film, which I watched a few months later in Frankfurt, Oxana is at a dance festival where she introduces herself: 'I am German-Nigerian and studied Javanese dance. I am interested in contemporary dance and politics, too. So my dance is focused on history, work and women.' It turns out later that this DVD is an important piece of memory for Layla and Oxana, as it is through that dance piece that they met in Berlin and Layla became first a member of the film crew on the documentary and later also Oxana's life partner and now wife. Since that first encounter at Tampere, I have met up with Oxana and Layla at three conferences (Finland, France, Canada) as well as while they were living in Berlin in 2017 and in New York in 2018, where I was able to observe more of their professional exploits and to participate in their more private and intimate life. I was able to get a glimpse into their lives and what it means for them to be active in Afro-feminist networks; how much that matters for their understanding of self, family and community, how important the notion of Black queer feminist sisterhood is for them.

Throughout their lives, transnational travel has become a condition to build and practise community in a double sense: experiencing a globally entangled Afrodiasporic and feminist activist community as well as relating to each other as a Black feminist queer couple. Oxana and Layla are both part of Black feminist activist movements where a quest for African origins is important for the creation of a personal African diaspora identity. In the Black and feminist political movements they navigate, life storytelling is part of that identity-building process and is related to the feminist mantra of framing the personal as political and the political as personal. Several of the conferences and events that I attended with them between 2017 and 2019 featured life-story panels, where people told their own biographies, whether Black Canadian lives, Black German lives or Afroeuropean lives.

Toronto, Canada – Visiting Oxana and Layla and travelling to the Black German Research and Heritage Association conference, 2018

After my talk at the Black German Research and Heritage Association in Toronto in May 2018, it is the turn of Daniel, a USA-based sociologist, who presents his research in which he looked at Black German identities, national and global Blackness and everyday understandings of Blackness and Germanness. What he does not say in his talk is that he collected all of his interviews at the annual meeting of the ISD – the Initiative for Black People in Germany, which is a political association advocating for the rights of Afrodescendant people and fighting racism in Germany. This is a political activist association and, to my knowledge, if you go to a meeting of the ISD or even know that the organisation exists you will already have been familiar with some of the political discourse on Blackness, and you will have dealt intellectually with the theme of racism and racialisation in a German as well as American context. I would not say that this is an everyday understanding of what it means to be a person of African descent in Germany; it comes from a left-wing, middle-class political activist community where people of African descent specifically claim a Black identity as well. If one wants to understand Black identities in Germany, the analysis will have to take class and personal trajectories more into account, because whereas the term 'Black' might refer to all African American people broadly, the same is not the case in Germany, where speaking of oneself as 'Black' still carries a certain political identification and awareness. (Fieldnote, May 2018)

Figure 9: Oxana and Layla at the market in Cannes (France), 2017, photo by author

Life stories in the lives and works of two artist-activists

Oxana Chi – the use of biographies in her work

Oxana was born in the early 1970s, but I do not know much about her experience growing up, as she is rather private. I only have bits and pieces of the story. She was inspired by Audre Lorde's feminism and May Ayim's Afro-German activism, and she evokes them both in some of her dance pieces. Her influences are far reaching and range from the USA to Taiwan and Indonesia. Born in Frankfurt, she grew up in Bochum in the Ruhr Valley, the child of a German mother and a Nigerian father. In an interview I found, I read that she has seen her father just once, when she was six years old and that he founded and chaired the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka (Wellershaus 2009). Oxana is in contact with relatives in Nigeria and has visited them. She grew up in a small town close to Bochum and mentions having brothers and sisters. When Oxana speaks about her childhood, it is happy memories that she communicates – how she was always an entertainer and started performing in their garden when she was little. How she went to a Waldorf school (based on the teachings of Rudolf Steiner), where creativity was encouraged. The stories she tells me about her life and travels relate to her passion and career as a dancer and performer. To follow this path, at the age of just 16, she went to live independently from her family, studying at a dance theatre in Düsseldorf that had been founded by an African American artist. After that she went to Folkwang University of the Arts, a well-known college in Essen (also in the Ruhr area), where she learned modern and classical dance, later moving to Berlin, where she worked as an independent artist. Oxana has travelled to many different countries and is influenced by a variety of different techniques and dances ranging from Tai Chi to Indian Kathak and Indonesian traditional dances, but the themes of her pieces are informed by her Black feminist ideals and are often shaped around famous Black or Afrodiasporic women or Women of Colour. Her piece 'Killjoy', which she performed at the Afroeuropeans conference where I first met her, was inspired by Angela Davis and Sara Ahmed's concept of 'feminist killjoy' as Layla Zami explains during the lecture-performance. At the next conference where I met the duo, in Cannes, they presented 'Dancing through Gardens', which is about the dancer Tatjana Barbakoff, who was of Russian Jewish and Chinese descent. The piece Oxana and Layla performed in Toronto, 'I Step on Air' is about May Ayim and her relation to Germany, her fight against racism and her journey to Ghana.

Oxana uses less of her own life story to talk about themes such as racism, marginalisation or political and artistic activism, but cites other biographies that tell stories about these themes. She brings these women back to life in her performances. Nevertheless, she does draw connections to her own life in these dance pieces. When she talks about Barbakoff, for example, she underlines that she feels

a spiritual connection to her, and that they have things in common. Oxana draws connections between the racism that killed Barbakoff and the racism that still exists today, in Berlin and elsewhere, which Oxana is confronted with, too.[1] She connects to the biographies she performs, but her own stories stay in the background. In an interview I did with her in Berlin, Oxana explains her piece 'I Step on Air' and how she understands herself in connection to the Afro-German movement:

> Oxana: I Step on Air is dedicated to May Ayim, but it is also about travelling […] first she is in her little world in Berlin and then there is the wish to get to know another world and then she is in Ghana with Togbe (her grandfather) […] and because she was a very political person it is also about politics, how *we* get invited and then uninvited again as people who are binational […] With 'we' in this context of May Ayim, I mean the Afro-German movement and People of Colour movement in Germany. Especially in Berlin, where she met Audre Lorde, the African American poet, and Dagmar Schultz and Ika Hügel, who supported her, and lesbian feminists in general.

When talking about the political significance of her piece, Oxana, uses 'we' to refer to the Afro-German, People of Colour and feminist movements to whom she sees herself connected. 'We' as binational people, 'we' as people who get invited and then uninvited again, 'we' the Afro-German movement in Germany and Berlin in particular. Thus, the piece is an affirmation of her political affiliation and community.

Figure 10: Oxana Chi performing Dancing through Gardens in Cannes, 2017, photo by author

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1   Barbakoff, who was of Jewish-Chinese-Russian origin, had to flee to France, but was captured by the Gestapo in 1944 and deported and killed in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Layla – a cosmopolitan presentation of self

Oxana's wife, Layla, is a researcher. When I began my research, she was completing a PhD at The Center for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies at Humboldt-University in Berlin, Germany with a work on the interrelations between performances and diasporic identities in the work of contemporary dancers. She later became faculty member at Pratt Institute and is now a Postdoctoral Researcher at Freie Universität Berlin. Her dissertation was published in 2020 by transcript under the title 'Contemporary PerforMemory: Dancing Through Spacetime, Historical Trauma, and Diaspora in the 21st Century' (Zami 2020). At the time of publishing her book, it received an Honorable Mention in the Oscar G. Brockett Prize in Dance Research in the USA. I met Layla at the 2017 Afroeuropeans conference in Finland. Layla presents herself on her personal website as 'an innovative academic and artist working with words, music, performance, and video. Born in Paris, France in 1985, Layla gains inspiration from a rich and complex Jewish-Russian-German and Afro-Caribbean-Indian heritage.' Layla shares the name Zami with Audre Lorde's biomythographical figure. Her mother is from the Caribbean island of Martinique, while Lorde's mother was from Carriacou in the same region. Layla works with Oxana, who is her friend and lover, which connects to the meaning of Zami: 'Madivine. Friending. Zami. How Carriacou women love each other is legend in Grenada, and so is their strength and their beauty' (Lorde 1983, p. 14). Zami highlights her connection to the matrilineal side of her family, as this is a family name in Martinique. In conversations and at conferences, her diverse cultural heritage is a frequent topic.

I visited Layla and Oxana in New York and we travelled together by train to the Black German Heritage conference, which Layla had told me about and where I applied to present my work after Oxana and Layla had talked about me to the organisers.

We are sitting on the train, and Layla has just finished putting together her presentation for the performance at the conference. We agreed that we would do an interview on the train. Layla comes to sit next to me, and I try to switch on the recorder. But the batteries are dead. So I use my cell phone. During our official interview, I never get the feeling that what Layla tells me was not thought over first; she is very considered in her choice of words and stories. She tells me a bit about her private life but not too much, no other love stories or identity struggles – everything seems quite smooth. Layla is eating a mango, she loves mangos, she says they remind her of her grandparents' house in Martinique. Before we start I tell her that I am interested to hear her life-story, but she also knows that I am interested in travel and mobility. (Fieldnote, 18 May 2018)

For the first years of her life, Layla grew up in Paris, and the family moved to Berlin when she was nine and back to France when she was fourteen. In her twenties, Layla decided to move again to Berlin, which she still considers (one of) her home(s), although for a while now her and Oxana have been living in New York (between 2018 and 2022). Layla has a very interesting family history of migration, which she tells me about:

> Berlin became my home [*Heimat*] and that was an interesting turn of events because the parents of my father are German, Jewish German and my mother is from Martinique.
>
> And the family on my father's side was German for generations, for many generations. They left Germany in 1933, and my father wanted to go to Berlin to reinstate that connection. [...] He wanted to have a relationship to German culture, and maybe he did not say 'he felt German' but almost in a way, and that was something my grandparents did not understand. And the interesting part is, I think it succeeded best with me, because I did – we moved to Berlin [and] lived there for a while, and after that I returned there myself to Germany, and now I have already lived half of my life in Berlin.

As dealing with and embodying her family heritage is very important for Layla and her understanding of self, she applied for German citizenship a few years back:

> I started the process, and it felt uncomfortable [dealing] with the authorities, a bit at the limit sometimes with how they treated you; because I made use of the law that was made after World War II, that if your parents or grandparents were German and had had citizenship taken away from them, then if you live in Germany again after however many years then after one or two years you are de facto German.

The law she refers to is Article 116 of the German Constitution, stating that every person and their descendants have the right to (re)acquire citizenship if it was revoked between 1933 and 1945. The text of the law makes it seem easy, but Layla gave up because of bureaucratic hurdles; she felt discouraged, as the offices were asking for many official documents which were very difficult to get owing to the persecution of her grandparents during the war.

Layla's father is a businessman in the field of screen printing and her mother is a medical doctor; Layla has one younger brother. Her parents were part of a politicised left-wing upper middle class milieu and had friends all over the world. Layla was introduced to left wing and anti-racist politics from a very young age through her parents and developed an interest in politics early on. As a teenager, she read a lot of African American literature (something she has in common with Maya and Aminata). Her interest in Africa and African diaspora also dates back to a very early

age too. When the family moved from Paris to Berlin when she was nine, she be-
came best friend with a girl whose family was from Cameroon. The father of that
friend was Prince Kum'a Ndumbe, the founder of *AfricAvenir*, an African diasporic
organisation for political education. It was also through this family that Layla was
introduced to Afro-German activism, as the mother of that friend knew May Ayim
personally and was acquainted with Afro-German organisations. 'I always saw the
book, on the bookshelf, at the Kum'a Ndumbe family's house', Layla said referring to
May Ayim's book *Grenzenlos und Unverschämt* (1997).

Layla's biography seems quite different from the others I have presented so far.
Her politicisation started very early and has always been a part of her life through her
friends and family. She grew up with her Caribbean heritage as a normal part of her
life through her mother and trips to Martinique to her see her grandparents, which
the family could afford to do every year. Her Jewish heritage also accompanied her
throughout her life, and she had her Bat Mitzvah at the age of fourteen; it was her
personal wish and not something that her family, who are very liberal, asked of her.
As a young teenager, she spent two summers at Camp Kinderland,[2] a Jewish left-
wing liberal summer camp in the USA. Later, she was an exchange student in South
Africa as part of her studies at Sciences Po Paris and did an internship at AfricAvenir
in Cameroon. She graduated from Sciences Po with a MA in International Relations
at the age of 21 and became a collaborator to Christiane Taubira at the French As-
sembly in Paris. Layla has already embodied a Black political and feminist identity
for many years and is very self-confident about it and her relations to her diverse
cultural heritage.

In Layla's private life, travelling to connect with her transnationally dispersed
family is important, and always has been since she was a child. In her adult life, she
brings her transnational experiences to bear in her presentation of her professional
identity, too, as a researcher and artist. She uses her diverse personal heritage to
present political messages on intersectionality, feminism or Blackness, just as Au-
dre Lorde used to do. And she embodies these political ideals in her private life. The
influences run in both directions.

Jewish museum Berlin

In Berlin in 2017, I went to several events in which Layla was involved –
these included the Jewish Museum's event 'New Jewishness: alliances in a post-
migration society'. On the podium, five scholars and writers that understand
themselves to be part of a contemporary Jewish diaspora in Germany discussed
the importance of building alliances between marginalised groups in society.
When the moderator addressed Layla for the first time, after 15 minutes, asking

2   The youth camp has its website at: http://campkinderland.org/ (accessed 7 April 2020).

about her work on intersectionality and her personal experiences of discrimination, she decided to answer another question that was addressed earlier, a question about the importance of alliances.

Layla: First I would like to say something about building alliances. I think it is beautiful and important that you united us over that theme here today, because for me, there is no future without alliances. And I really mean that; alliances are not just a catchword for me, but the headline of my life. I myself am the result of a very large alliance which happened thirty-three years ago, between Jewish European Russian and Afro-Indian Caribbean communities. And in my daily life I deal with the importance of alliances too, how can alliances be encouraging, productive, creative? (Fieldnote, November 2017)

Here Layla stresses the importance that alliances have by making use of her biography and biological descent as a symbol for cross-fertilising alliances across difference. Her performance of self often foregrounds her transcultural heritage, and in this way she is able to build a coherent self which is based on multilocality, multinationality and multiculturality, and which stands in stark contrast to nationalist ideas of ethnic uniformity – something else she confronts in her work as an activist and researcher. Layla was the only Black person on stage and did not want to be reduced to discussing experiences of discrimination. She decided to answer the question on discrimination differently, talking about how well she had been received by the Jewish doctoral scholarship programme ELES – Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Studienwerk,[3] and that instead of discrimination she felt a strong solidarity between people there.

Practising community digitally and in mobility

Oxana and Layla often post photos and texts on digital media about their work or their latest travel destinations. This is also a way to construct an ideal of the self. When I talked to Layla, she liked to associate herself with the late Ghanaian-German poet May Ayim. During our interview, she told me that she felt that Ayim was her soulmate, that she felt a deep connection to her life and work. In August 2019, Oxana and Layla travelled together to Ghana to perform the piece 'I Step on Air', which Oxana had choreographed. For the occasion, Layla created a Facebook post. The post showed a picture of May Ayim with a Kente headband, and the text read:

This is May Ayim (1960–1996) brilliant, beautiful Ghanaian-German feminist writer, activist, performer, teacher. I feel incredibly honoured and moved to

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3   The scholarship programme's website is at: https://eles-studienwerk.de/ (accessed 30 November 2020).

travel to her roots and perform in Oxana Chi's dance-music-word-performance-tribute at the University of Ghana Legon this month. (Layla, post July 2019).

In the comments section underneath the post, several people told Layla that she resembles May Ayim in the photo. This shows that Layla's self-undersatanding and association with Ayim does not stand alone, it is also confirmed by others. This confirmation of the resemblance is a way of narrating the community not only as political but also as extended family, through the use of kin terms such as, in one comment 'Ancestors live' or when Layla calls her friend 'Tati', a French nickname for aunty. Narration of self does not happen in isolation; the audience is vital. The social media post has manifold functions: It is way to promote their work, to make the iconic Afro-German figure of May Ayim better known to the world and to remember her, and to create a self that is related to Ayim and to the Black political movement worldwide.

A few weeks after I went with them to the conference in Toronto that united people over Black German studies, Oxana created a digital post about the event, including some photos they had taken.

Transnational Perspectives on Black Germany… the Conference was brilliant, and the audience loved our performance and presentation! Here are some impressions from our beautiful time in Toronto with great academics, art and super yummy food. […] (Oxana, Facebook post June 2018)

At the conference itself, Oxana and Layla's practice of taking group photos often reminded me of family gatherings, where there is always one aunt taking group photos and constantly reminding anyone who was not in the mood that afterwards everyone would surely be happy to have that image for posterity. One comment under the photo album, from Dr Rosemarie Peña, Founding Director of the Black German Heritage and Research Association, ran: 'Wonderful photos! If only we could relive these moments. I miss everyone so much!' The photos and the act of taking them were an act of community-making too. Taking and sharing pictures of an event at a later stage helps create a feeling of belonging that one can have access to retrospectively. You can look at these pictures and at the same time, by commenting virtually, engage in communication from a distance. In this case, the community is one of people working on issues relating to Black Germans. People at the conference unite there for a few days but live in very different places and only meet very occasionally, so to create a community in such transnationally dispersed circumstances is no easy task. Thus, a social media group for a research network is supposed to create a certain continuity among a transient community – to keep the imagination of it alive.

Oxana and Layla are part of a Black feminist activist community in which a claim to African origins is important for a positive affirmation of one's African descent. In

these Black political movements, life storytelling is part of an identity-building process. As artists, moreover, Oxana and Layla curate their own biographies carefully. Oxana uses her art to relate political stories; she gained expertise in biographical storytelling through her work as a dancer and performer. Layla gained that expertise through her academic engagement and by being an active member of Oxana's performance group. In both cases their artistic self is intertwined with their activist self. By being who they are and doing what they do for a living, they are always politically active. When Oxana and Layla tell me about their life and travel experiences, the act of narrating these is an act of confirming their Black and feminist activist selves. Sharing personal stories with other people of African descent is another way to build this feeling of community. The anthropologist Naomi Leite (2017) argues that people who have been involved in a particular identity movement (in her case, Jewish Marrano identity in Portugal) have more developed narratives of self because they have dealt a lot with their own biographies and discussed them with members of the identity movement and others. They use their biographies and, in particular, certain events in their lives to stress how their Jewishness was reflected and revealed to them. The telling of their lives becomes a testimony of their Jewishness where other evidence is almost impossible to find, as Jews were expelled or forced to convert during the Inquisition between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. This sharing of stories paves the way for a rebuilding of the Marrano community. The sharing of a story for Oxana and Layla can happen anytime, more likely at events and conferences dedicated to the themes of Black identities, but also randomly in an everyday situation – for example while on the train.

Life storytelling during a chance encounter

In May 2018, taking the train with Oxana and Layla from New York, where they currently live, to Toronto to attend a conference organised by the Black German Heritage and Research Association, where they are invited as keynote performers, I notice at one point that Layla has started a conversation with an African American woman sitting behind them. Before the conversation, they had already introduced themselves to her as two Afro-German performers.
After a while I join the conversation. Layla says to Oxana, 'You know, this lady has already been to Gorée island in Senegal and in Ghana!' The woman in question is an African American woman from Brooklyn, and she quickly begins to tell her experiences of group roots travel to Ghana and Senegal. An artist and gallerist in her forties from Ghana, who was living and working in Brooklyn too, had organised this trip with friends and acquaintances from around the USA. So they went there with a group of over 100 people. That was twenty years ago, in the 1990s. A friend advised her to bring an empty suitcase because she would buy so much stuff there. 'What a wise decision', she remembers. I ask her what she bought, and she says a stool, Kente cloth and many more items. She

goes on to relate more of her experiences to Layla and Oxana: 'It was amazing. I could wander the streets there: all black people; nobody was bothering you, all Africans. That felt so good.' she says. And we all nod and agree when Layla asks her: 'And in Senegal, did people think you were from there?' 'No', she answers. 'People were very different there.' In the first sentence she affirms her belonging to a global Black and African community while in the second she underlines the cultural differences she felt, as well as the differences between the two countries visited..

Layla and Oxana are planning to go to Ghana in August of 2018. They will attend a conference in Accra and perform their piece 'I Step on Air'. Layla says that when they go to Ghana she is also very interested to learn about the history of the slave trade, because she carries Caribbean heritage in her too (her mother being from Martinique). 'Maybe Oxana, as she is Nigerian-German, maybe she is not that interested in that…' But Oxana contradicts this instantly, saying that of course she is interested, why wouldn't she be. The woman goes on to relate more of her family history, saying that her great-great-grandmother used to talk about the red soil in Africa, and that when she then looked out the window of the plane in Ghana it was amazing to see this with her own eyes, 'Red soil everywhere!' (Fieldnote on the train, May 2018)

This encounter on the train and the random conversation that arises is a way of practising and creating Afrodiasporic identification and embodying the idea of Black community and solidarity. Talking about their African roots with this woman, sharing bits of personal family stories that relate to an African heritage, and sharing stories from their lives in New York or Berlin, allows Layla and Oxana to learn more about what it means to be a person of African descent in today's world and to affirm themselves as such. What creates a sense of community in this encounter is the reference to a symbolic place for the African diaspora: Ghana is one of the most important countries for African American roots tourism. The woman on the train has been there already and as Layla and Oxana are planning to go there soon they can exchange information about their (expected) experiences. Beyond these everyday interactions, it is through narration, dance, research and attending conferences on Black and feminist themes that Oxana and Layla practise their diasporic identification and community very consciously. In her ethnography, Leite writes that the encounters between Portuguese Marranos and international Jewish heritage tourists 'fulfil a desire for direct contact, putting face and flesh to the abstract image of "the Marrano"; as a near second it is about emotion and interpersonal connection' (2017, p. 186). This desire for direct contact reflects very well what happens at the conferences and events I attended with Oxana and Layla. It is a wish to connect, to align one's agendas, yet also a way of exploring the many differences that the African diaspora constitutes – and to celebrate that diversity.

Curating life stories at conferences

Oxana and Layla try to regularly attend conferences that centre on Black and Afro-diasporic or feminist themes. At these conferences, a space is created where being a Black activist and researcher suddenly becomes the norm instead of the exception, because one is surrounded by people who do the same things and know the same references as oneself. At such conferences, the presentations of life stories are more curated than in daily practice and the performance – whether it be in words, or via dress, music and/or dance – becomes central.

> Conference in Toronto
>
> Going through the programme of the conference in Toronto, I realise that life stories form a big part of the panels and that the topics of many presentations are personal transnational autobiographies between the USA and Germany or narrated biographies (such as I present) of Germans of African (or African American) descent or African Americans of German descent.
> When I asked one woman how she came to know about the Black German Heritage and Research Association (BGHRA) conference,[4] she told me that she had already attended the conference several times [it has existed for about ten years and takes place every two years]. She was studying in the German Studies department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. This young woman with impeccable German and English was obviously friendly and familiar with many of the organisers; she often sat in the front row and greeted many of the presenters. She told me that her first BGHRA conference had been very exciting for her because it had been the first time she had shared her own story. She was on the organising committee and had narrated her life story – the way she framed it, I imagined it like a rite of passage to activism. I, too, chose to present life stories at this conference, mixing Oxana's story with those of Ika Hügel-Marshall and May Ayim. Although I obviously could not share my own story, as I was not of African descent, I learned through reading Black German life stories, and by listening to those of other people of African descent at conferences, how to narrate them in a particular way, focusing on certain aspects of the biography – such as growing up as a racialised person (woman or man) and feelings of exclusion and not fitting the norm, and how the building of connections to other people of African descent in one's own country or elsewhere helped in the process of dealing positively with African origins and to find a voice against racism. For me, too, this conference felt like a rite of passage for understanding the importance of life stories in Black movements.
> On the second evening of the conference, Oxana and Layla's performance takes place, including spoken word and music by Layla and dance by Oxana. They

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4   The conference website is at: http://bghra.org/ut-2018/.

perform it in a theatre on the university campus. The performance is meticulously curated and, although they have shown the piece at many different festivals over the years, they spent a lot of time practising and preparing for this performance in their New York studio, where I was able to attend one of their training sessions. For the evening in Toronto, Oxana has nicely shaped her red Afro and put on clothes the colour of red earth, which is often associated with West Africa. Layla has donned a colourful jumpsuit and sports a hairband with several patterns on it that underlines her connection to an African heritage and also connects her to May Ayim, who used to wear hair-wraps. Oxana curates her dance pieces from head to toe, and for every piece she has a special dress made, usually by her favourite seamstress in Berlin. Layla begins with a short lecture introducing the work of May Ayim. After that she joins Oxana in a performance where Oxana dances and Layla plays instruments and performs a poem by May Ayim. (Fieldnote, May 2018)

Figure 11: Performance of 'I Step on Air'. Photo 1 by the author, photo 2 by Kearra Amaya Gopee © Oxana Chi

Oxana describes the piece 'I Step on Air' thus:

[it] takes the audience through May Ayim's historical engagement as a poet, writer, activist and academic in Germany and her experience as a Black German woman tracing her roots to Ghana. The encounter of circular storytelling, grounded in West African narrative traditions, innovative body language, and atmospheric music, results in an entertaining and meditative show.[5]

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5   For more information about the performance, see: http://www.oxanachi.de/productions/i-step-on-air.html (accessed 4 February 2020).

The West African connection can be found in many details – in the materials they use, the colours they chose, Oxana's movements and Layla's music. It is a really enchanting and indeed meditative show. It is only after their performance that Oxana and Layla are truly able to relax and enjoy the conference, and I can sense how lucky they feel to finally be able to engage with the conference attendees and general public after the show and in the following days. They continue the conference by making connections with other researchers and by carrying on with their practice of taking numerous photos, which is a ritual of theirs at such events and gatherings. It is their way of creating and enlarging their Black feminist global community – the photos give them something that they can share with the attendees. As well as being sites of professional connection, these events also represent another form of community-making. Being at events with other Black and feminist activists offers a space for relaxing and restoring energy levels to continue the fight against racism and sexism. To spend a while with a community of like-minded people and with many Black women gives them strength to confront life where Black people and People of Colour are minorities that suffer racial discrimination.

Taking time off from performing – self-care

Throughout Oxana and Layla's lives, transnational travel has become a condition for building and practising community in a double sense: by experiencing a globally entangled Afrodiasporic activist community and by relating to and building a global network of dancers, performers and researchers. Because Oxana and Layla travel a lot and get to know many different people, the creation of routines while traveling and the creation of time just for the two of them outside the conference setting is essential to keeping up a happy mindset in such a mobile life, where the lines between public and private are blurred. The only time I met Oxana alone was in Berlin. It is here that they have their extended networks of friends; as Oxana and Layla previously led separate lives in Berlin, their activities and the people they know are diversified. While travelling together and at conferences, I noticed that they stuck together a lot: performing together, sitting together, coming and going together. In a place or at an event where you are not familiar with most people or with the environment, it is normal that you stick with the person that you know best, I believe. It gives comfort. At the three conferences that I attended with them, Oxana and Layla withdrew from group activities from time to time in order to spend time on their own, working, doing dance practice or discovering a new place. In France and Canada as well as on the train from New York to Toronto, I was able to be present during some of that private time. Travelling together with your participants opens up the potential of 'new convivialities' (Coates 2017, p. 240). At a conference in Cannes in December 2017, which was about dancer biographies and exile, I joined in their rou-

tines and a familiarity quickly developed, especially through cooking together. Here, as in Toronto, their first activity was to go and check out the market.

Strolling and cooking

In Cannes, I meet Oxana and Layla on the street. We want to go together to the Marché de Forville. 'We always go to the market when we travel', they tell me. The night before, they had written a message to ask me if I had a kitchen in my rental accommodation, because then we could cook together. They only had a small kitchenette, and were not really able to cook there, which stressed them out a bit, because they always prefer to cook for themselves when they travel. Fortunately, I did have one. This way I was able to spend some more time with them, chatting while chopping the carrots. Cooking together, much like travelling together, created a certain kind of intimacy. We were able to get a feel for each other and talk more freely about what interested us. I explained in more detail about my research project and youth in Frankfurt, and we chatted about various things. To share these intimate moments was for me very important, as otherwise I only saw them during the conferences and events where we had many distractions and where a performance of self is more in the foreground. (Fieldnote, Cannes, December 2017)
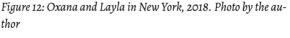
Important as it is for both Layla and Oxana to build a global network with Black and feminist activists and dancers, the aspect of self-care as a couple and as individuals is crucial, too. It can also be seen as embodying Black feminist ideas, where such self-care is a form of political resistance against oppression (Lorde 1988).

The Black activist self, couple and community in mobility

Both Oxana and Layla embrace a hybrid understanding of diasporic identity, where movement and uprootedness are characteristic traits of self-perception (Gilroy 1993, Hall 1990). They engage with the African diaspora in mobility – through Oxana's moving body and by travelling transnationally.

A few days before going to the conference to Toronto together, we sat on the rooftop of their apartment in New York and spoke about feelings of home. I told them that I too was interested in the topic of home and mobility because I had the feeling, in my personal situation of being a mobile researcher, that the more I travelled, the more I had a longing to be just in one place and not move: 'I feel it is special that you have each other when you travel and move.' They both agreed. 'I would say that yes, at this point, Oxana is my home,' Layla argued, 'We have become real nomads.' What particularly interested them about my project from the start was the notion of travel, as it had become very important in their lives as travelling artists and academics. Oxana and Layla are what I would call 'embodied activists'. Their

political ideals transcend both their private and professional lives. But even in their cases, having an activist identity as Black and feminist was a process and was not just there from the beginning – although, as Layla explains in this chapter, her family education meant she had already become sensitive to anti-racism. In his research on Chicano/a identities of Mexican Americans, Luis Urrieta underlines four important steps in the process of activist identity production: '(1) intellectual engagement, (2) activist rites of passage, (3) leadership, and (4) raising consciousness' (2007, p. 131). These steps were clearly important in the trajectories of Layla and Oxana, who are constantly engaged in raising awareness of racism and sexism and are not afraid of leadership in that regard – they even embrace it by supporting each other in their activities. Yet there are further elements important to them as activists: the constant wish to connect to other Black and feminist activists and create global networks of solidarity. In order to foster these connections, life storytelling plays an important part in the professional context of performances at conferences and events, but also in everyday conversations as it creates points of empathy.

Figure 12: Oxana and Layla in New York, 2018. Photo by the author

Conclusion to Part III

What I have intended to show in the two main closing chapters is that life storytelling and sharing is a crucial part in the making of a Black feminist activist self and in fostering Black political community. I opened the thesis with a vignette about a life-story panel. I did so because the life story is an important thread of my research on building Afrodiasporic identities, and this last part takes life storytelling as an artistic, political and community-building practice at its centre. I argue that, much like coming-out stories for gay men and lesbian women (Weston 1997), the sharing of one's life story, of experiences with discrimination and finding relief with a group of people who have experienced the same things, functions both as a community-building practice and as a self-identity-forming process. Kath Weston, researching gay and lesbian family-making, writes of coming-out stories:

> Such narratives are customarily related to and for other lesbians and gay men rather than for the benefit of a heterosexual audience. Coming-out stories had the advantage of representing a category meaningful to participants themselves. (1997, p. 15)

The life story in Black movements is a way to connect emotionally to a community of experience. The two chapters in Part III show that life storytelling is a process that evolves over time, it is learned and situated. In the case of Black and feminist activists, it is learned by becoming acquainted with Black literature, going to events on Black identities and being involved in Black communities. I explore the tradition of life storytelling and writing in Black and feminist movements and how the practice travelled from the USA to Germany through the key activist figure and icon of the Afro-German movement, Audre Lorde. In many of her writings, Lorde reflects on themes – from structural racism to lesbian love and female solidarity – through autobiographical narration, and this in turn has influenced Afro-German activists of different generations and ages – from Ika Hügel-Marshall, who was born after World War II, to May Ayim, who was born in the 1960s, to contemporary activists such as Oxana Chi and Layla Zami.

Forging an activist identity is a process linked to personal development, as feminist scholar Lekkie Hopkins explains in her article 'Creating an Activist Voice' (2001). The encounter with Black scholarship can be key to developing an activist identity for people of African descent. It can lead to a re-storying of self in light of experiences of racism and racialisation (Urrieta 2007). Yet life storytelling is not only important for self-fashioning: It has an important role in creating community. Reading or hearing these life stories is intended to resonate with Afrodescendant or racialised women. Nevertheless, it is important to note that such activist practice is a niche activity for Afrodescendant people in Germany and only includes those who have been involved in Black or feminist movements. Yet it is still gaining prominence through the resurgence of movements such as Black Lives Matter in 2020, a movement in which 'Say their names' is a crucial slogan. In their work as Afro-feminist performers and researchers, Layla and Oxana mobilise both biographies and autobiographical narration. They seek to restore memories of women who have often been marginalised and forgotten by history. Their performances are a way to bring their memories back to life and also to present them to a global public of Black feminists, and feminists in general. By means of this practice of wide dissemination and thanks to the flexibility that has allowed them to travel and live in different corners of the world, they have been able to build a global political and artistic network.

Oxana and Layla operate on another level of activism to the likes of Aminata, who is very dedicated on the local and national scales. Aminata is also much less transnationally mobile, and her rootedness in Frankfurt is important for her family and her networks. Furthermore, political activism is only one part of Aminata and Lamine Camara's lives, while it is at the centre of Oxana and Layla's. Oxana and Layla are not directly involved in national or local politics, although Oxana's dance repertoire features many figures who were active in Germany. Rather, the important thing that they want to stress is the diversity and hybridity of diasporic identities, which can be detached from a national context. The component of mobility – that is, being internationally mobile as well as using the moving body to tell stories – makes it possible to connect (with) different communities on a global scale. Oxana and Layla put a lot of emphasis on mobility for developing diaspora, an aspect that Gilroy (1993) has stressed as being crucial to the development and dissemination of the concept of African diaspora. Gilroy underlines the potential of transformation through travel, the potential to analyse socially and culturally constructed categories – the concept of race, for example – by getting to know other contexts, but he also acknowledges the importance of national context. Travelling in Europe as well as to Africa has made many African American intellectuals realise how attached they are to the category of national belonging – both that they had an American national identity and that they were perceived not only seen as Black but also as American in other countries. In this way, they were able to develop elsewhere a feeling they were often denied in the USA. Gilroy described that feeling for the likes of Martin Delany or the writer

Richard Wright. In Oxana and Layla's case, when they travel their German/French nationalities also play an important role; Oxana has often discussed how she experiences that her Germanness is often more accepted elsewhere than in Germany. The German national context is not central to her understanding of self, but it does play a role. Oxana and Layla's engagement in Black and feminist politics goes beyond their professional lives and suffuses their private lives too; the two are not separable. Being a Black and feminist activist is an embodied activity that they carry everywhere with them. As a couple they live the ideals of Black and female solidarity by supporting, working and loving each other. Oxana and Layla build community with each other, and by travelling and performing they co-build a global network of Black and feminist artists and researchers.

Conclusion

In this book, which was originally written as a doctoral dissertation, I considered what it is like to grow up as a person of African descent in Germany today. The research engaged with the lives of women born in the 1980s, from the generation known as millennials, and considered how diasporic identities are made in practice. For this work I merged local, national, transnational and global scales in order to understand diasporic identities in a broad context. It explored how practising diaspora is attached to generational consciousness, how being part of an educated urban middle class influenced coping with experiences of racism/racialisation and political identity formation; and last but not least, it questioned the role of kinship in the making of African diaspora identities at the intimate (engaging with transnational kin) and political levels (by engaging in Black political communities as a form of 'chosen family' [Weston 1997]). Ethnographic engagements with African diaspora and Blackness are still scarce, and they often focus on forms of political activism. I was interested in everyday understandings and practices of diaspora. Although activism has an important place in all this, the book also shows people before they became politically active in Black movements as well as people who are not politically active at all. This is a way of illustrating different experiences of what it means to be a person of African descent in Germany. The diasporic practices of the women I follow range from Black political activism, practising 'symbolic ethnicity' (Gans 1979) by wearing African garments, wearing their hair natural, listening to African music, cooking African food, and celebrating feasts, to the practice of travelling to connect with kin and other Black communities. Through this mix of practices, my interlocutors are able to forge both a *decentred* diasporic identity as Black Germans or Afro-Europeans as well as a *centred* diasporic identity as German-Guinean or Senegalese-German. The former is typified by Oxana Chi and Layla Zami, for whom it is more important to build a global Black feminist community by engaging in mobility than to engage with their ancestral countries of origin (Martinique and Nigeria respectively), or in the way that cities such as London and Paris can become places to experience and practice diasporic identity as Afrodescendant in Europe for Maya or Aminata. The centered aspect is well shown through Lafia who is looking to connect to the country of origin of her father – Senegal. In their practices, the

women also shift between essentialist and hybrid approaches to diaspora. Although these women share an awareness that the essentialisation of identity is part of the problem of racialisation and racism, they sometimes use essentialisation with regard to others, too. For example, when Lafia referred to the French writer Marie Ndiaye as a 'Senegalese author' whom she could not connect to. At times they even essentialise their own identities – for instance when Aminata spoke of herself as a 'German potato' to explain her reaction when her son had an accident in Ghana. Essentialisation is used in a strategic way here, to connect to African diaspora broadly and to underline a specific relation or reaction, what Gilroy calls 'strategic essentialism' (1993, p. 31). Yet in their everyday practices, the women use a hybrid and situated understanding of identity that cannot simply be reduced to ethnicity, nationality, age or gender.

Forging diasporic identities across generations

Working with friends and in my hometown of Frankfurt paved the way for a deep and nuanced analysis because of the knowledge that I was able to bring into the field and the relationships I already had with the women prior to the research. Global Black and African diaspora movements and scholarship are crucial for developing a personal African diaspora identity in Germany. Black American cultural production and the travels of Black American intellectuals like Audre Lorde were important in shaping Afrodiasporic identities in the 1980s in Germany, and are still important today, as new movements such as Black Lives Matter show, with its German chapters. Yet for the women in my research, the USA is only one point of orientation among many. It was of particular significance when they were teenagers as it helped them to forge a positive sense of racialised identity by leaning towards Black America and exploring the GI cultural world in and around Frankfurt. The shared memory of spending time together in spaces such as nightclubs and other military institutions (e.g. the PX) still creates a feeling of community today. Yet their focus on Afrodiasporic practice has evolved as adults and their orientations are now towards a variety of places. Their points of reference have multiplied today and through various practices the women refer to a vast array of Afrodiasporic identities – for example by exploring Afro-European cultures in London, Paris or Lisbon, and also by dealing more with their countries and regions of parental origin in West Africa. Travelling and the opportunities afforded by the internet have also helped them relate to different sources and places of inspiration. The multitude of Afrodiasporic bloggers around the world in areas such as fashion, music and politics offer many possibilities to relate to a multi-centred African diaspora.

And the digital sphere also creates opportunities to deal more directly with parents' country of origin. My interlocutors can stay up to date with political events or

follow specific bloggers or organisations, which may strengthen their links to places of origin. This last point is particularly relevant to the diasporic practices of the parent generation, who came to Germany as migrants, as the father of Aminata, Lamine Camara, told me. Through digital media, he has been able to follow the political situation in Guinea on a daily basis, and he can communicate with his political allies in different countries such as France or in other parts of Germany.

What my work also shows in relation to generation is that there are certain continuities between people of African descent who lived in Germany in different periods – and one such strand is the fight against racism. Whether in 1880, when Africans came to Germany as colonial subjects and scientific racism was on the rise, or in the Black Lives Matter movement today, people have always used their agency to contest racism and to form coalitions against it. However, racism takes different forms in different generations. Whereas the people of African descent who came as colonial subjects had to fight against a pseudo-scientific racism that was increasingly integrated into the legal and executive system of the German Empire, then the Weimar Republic, and then completely institutionalised in the Third Reich, people of African descent today face a 'racism without races' (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991, p. 21). Racism is no longer based on the construction of different biological human races, thereby justifying the domination of one group over another. Instead, it works by stressing intractable cultural differences between 'migrants' (referring to all non-white people) and 'natives' (referring to all white people). This new form of racism – called neo-racism, cultural or differentialist racism – that developed after World War II essentialises cultural differences. Cultural socialisation is considered as a fixed and stable characteristic of a person, something impossible to change – but crucially only for those who in the old form of scientific racism were classified as non-Aryan or coloured. It works against Muslims as well as people of African or Asian origin, who are portrayed as essentially culturally different (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991, Fassin & Fassin 2009, Taguieff 1985).

Racialised middle classness – an intersectional approach

How does being part of an educated urban middle class influence experiences of racism and racialisation? Ethnographic studies of racialised middle classness and those looking more generally at the intersection of race and class are rare, particularly in Germany. Most studies relating class and race concern racialised working class groups around the world. Yet the mechanisms of racism and racialisation and the means available to combat them vary according to the socioeconomic situations of those who face them. The women who were at the core of this study face racialisation and 'migrantisation', as Fatima El-Tayeb termed the process of othering of Black people and People of Colour in Germany (2011, 2016). It refers to the process of

portraying people of non-European descent as eternal newcomers, regardless how many generations they have already lived in Germany. Whereas Aminata's father does not have a big problem with being seen as newcomer, as he arrived as a migrant (although this was now more than 40 years ago), Aminata Camara is struggling against that false assumption towards her and is especially worried for her children, as she sees that racialisation is still happening to them. It is the reason why an anti-racist education transporting a positive sense of their West African descent (Guinean-Ghanaian) has become very important for Aminata, as she sees that as the most important tool to fight against racist structures in society.

Experiences of racism and racialisation weigh psychologically on the people I worked with and induce a racialised fear of the possible loss of their middle-class status. The fear of status loss has been described as a typical characteristic of the middle class with its in-between location between workers and those who own the means of production (Ehrenreich 1989, Weiss 2019). Yet the fear for my interlocutors is accentuated because they are racialised. They worry that their children will face discrimination in their jobs, the housing market or the education system (which has indeed already happened) and that racial discrimination could have consequences for their professional trajectories. The women of the study are all middle-class and highly educated. But this middle-class status is in fact a 'contradictory class location' (Carrier 2015, p. 34): Despite being highly educated, many have faced or still face precarious work situations, with short-term contracts or low wages in the cultural sector; they entered the job market after the neoliberal pension and labour reforms of the German 'Sozialstaat' (welfare state) undertaken since the early 2000s (Butterwegge et al. 2007). Their economic position does not feel secure and, as Aminata formulated it, 'we have to work hard every day to bring two kids up', referring to herself and her husband. This fear of falling also has an effect on the relations built with transnational kin in Ghana. On the other hand, the opportunity they had to partake in higher education also provided the women with significant social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986a); their social position in Germany is not precarious; they have German nationality, strong social networks and access to many resources (knowledge about literature, blogs, civil society organisations) to fight racism and to forge a self-empowered subject position. They also come from an urban middle-class milieu where being from different cultural backgrounds is celebrated more than it is stigmatised. That position in society also gives them a certain economic and cultural capital. Although African-ness is racialised in Germany, the women grew up in intimate circles where it was marked as positive – though sometimes in the negative sense of being exoticised. They still have to live with discrimination, but they grew into adults knowing that this is a structural problem in society and not theirs alone. This racialised middle-class position bears both privileges and vulnerabilities. Gender plays a role in the development of their Afrodiasporic identities, too. The feeling of not conforming to common German beauty standards and of always being per-

ceived as exotic led to certain struggles during the women's youth. This was partly responsible for their turning to Black American cultural production, where they were able to find themselves reflected in terms of beauty, and to the foreign world of the GIs. A growing awareness of racialisation as adults, on the other hand, led to them accentuating Afro-centred traits such as wearing their hair naturally. Black beauty blogs, websites and novels helped them in this endeavour to redefine what beauty meant.

'Say their names' – listening to and sharing life stories

What is the role of life storytelling for the construction of self and community? The Afrodiasporic identities of my participants began to become more pronounced once they could be externalised – or objectified in the sense that they could recognise that their subjective experiences were shared by others. Maya and Aminata 'became Black' when reading about the experiences of racial discrimination of other people of African descent in Germany and the USA; it legitimated their own experiences of racism and racialisation and made them intersubjective. Hearing and reading about others' experiences with racism, racialisation and their intersection with sexism created empathy and made possible an identification with being Black and global Blackness – it created a possibility of self-understanding as well as identification with a larger group who faced the same structural injustice. This finding of one's experiences in others is crucial in building identity. And other's experiences helped them in narrating their own lives. In their life stories, my interlocutors create a narrative identity which includes Ricœur's two identity concepts of identity as *idem* and as *ipse*. The telling of their lives allows them to create a coherent and permanent self in time, while at the same time it allows the inclusion of ruptures and tensions in their identity constructions; their stories elucidate how being Afrodescendant has mattered throughout their lives: from something they might reject to a trait they identify with and embrace.

One of the crucial slogans of the global Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 and beyond has been 'Say their names!'. This refers to the importance to remember Black people who fell victim to police murders. Whether Breonna Taylor in the USA, Adama Traoré in France or Oury Jalloh in Germany, Black activists want to remember the lives of those taken and tell their stories, because otherwise their deaths would go unsanctioned and their lives would be forgotten in the public memory. Remembering is thus a practice of testimony against marginalisation, a practice that has been important for many oppressed groups who only had their lived experiences to share as evidence of experienced violence. The more evidence there is the more objective it becomes. Life-story sharing was a practise that Audre Lorde advised her Afrodescendant students to make use of in Berlin in 1984 (see Chapter 9), two years before the

Afro-German anthology of writing and scholarship *Showing Our Colours: Afro-German Women Speak Out* came out in 1986. To counter racism anywhere in the world, Black activists consider it a powerful strategy to tell their own or others' (life-)stories, to forge themselves a place in history that is more than the marginal one that the lives of Afrodescendant people in Europe or the USA are usually granted; though this is generally much truer of Europe than the USA, where Black political movements and organisations have more influence than is the case in most European countries.

This book demonstrates that telling and sharing life stories is an act of resistance against racism, a means of making marginalised lives visible, and an act of community building to create solidarity. This activist tradition lies at the core of this work, which explores the role that life storytelling and sharing has in Black and Afrodiasporic movements. Yet it goes beyond the public educational effect the practice is supposed to engender and focuses instead on the role this storytelling and sharing has in bringing a community of experience together; much like 'coming-out' stories function as a community-building tool for gay men and lesbian women (Weston 1997). The sharing of one's life story, of experiences with racism and finding relief in a Black community function both as community-building practices and self-identity processes for people of African descent active in anti-racism networks. In my research, the life story was both a method and an object of study. I use it as a method to let my interlocutors tell me how they grew up and became who they are today, but I also analyse the relevance that life storytelling has for the construction of the women's Afrodiasporic identities. By following the travels of Oxana Chi and Layla Zami, I could perceive how they used Black and feminist activist ideals to story their selves in performances and lectures and how they also storied others for Black feminist activist purposes. Oxana brings biographical memories back to life through dance performance. Oxana and Layla use movement both in the sense of transnational mobility to connect to Black and feminist activists worldwide and in the sense of moving the body in performances in order to transmit the memories of Black women and Women of Colour on an emotional level. They embody the importance of movement for constructing African diaspora (Gilroy 1993). For Lafia or Maya, who are not part of political activist groups, the use of stories and novels helped them connect to their own lives and develop their diasporic identification as they formulated a 'narrative identity' Ricœur (1988).

Travelling to connect or to practise cultural identity

What is the role of kinship in the making of Afro-diasporic identities and the role of travelling to build kinship ties? Kinship is essential in the process of diasporic identity-making for the women. and, at the same time, dealing with their African ancestry throughout their lives affected how they wanted to practice kinship. While

reconnection efforts with African transnational kin were at the core of strategies to develop Afrodiasporic identities, the desire not to deal with that part of the self often made relations with African kin (whether close or distant) difficult for the women as teenagers and young adults. This book considers travelling to places defined as 'origins' as an important practice for dealing with Afrodiasporic identity. This allows the women in my research to engage with their African origins in the form of lived experience and helps them redefine what their origins mean to them. The lived experience offered via mobility is of particular importance for building transnational kinship relations and practising cultural skills. The travels the women engage in are very diverse and range from first-time roots travel to Senegal by Lafia T. to visit the country of her father and get to know extended family (Chapter 7); to a family visit to Ghana in Aminata's case, where they travelled to visit Albert's family (Chapter 8) and a work-move to Nigeria in the case of Maya, whose father is from Sierra Leone (Chapter 6). They can neither be subsumed under the label 'roots tourism' nor under 'transnational family visit', yet they include aspects of both; they are led by the motivation to deeply engage with the places the women define as ancestral as form of engagement with the self as well as a motivation to construct kinship relations. These diasporic travels are motivated by a wish to create family ties with distant kin, to turn a 'mutuality of being', where what makes kinship is the awareness of being part of a same lineage, into a 'mutuality of existence', where kinship is based on taking part in one another's lives (Sahlins 2011a, 2011b, Trémon 2022).

The travels also reveal the difficulties and limits of doing kinship with distant kin. Examining the practices of care employed during these journeys shows, on the one hand, how a feeling of becoming part of a family can be produced through everyday practices such as sharing food and time together (Lafia in Senegal in Chapter 7) – hence, how intimacy can be produced through care. On the other hand, a focus on care can reveal how, especially in a situation of crisis, the differences between close and distant kin become more pronounced and are revealed in care practices, with caring for close kin taking priority, as these are the people who are part of one's everyday life (Aminata in Ghana in Chapter 8). The production of trust is tied to the production of caring relationships, and trust can only be created over time. Caring is also relevant on a socioeconomic level. In relation to their kin in Ghana, Sierra Leone or Senegal, the geopolitical positions of my interlocutors are privileged; the fact that they are from a rich country in the Global North not only elevates their economic status but it is also attached to the privilege of travel freedom that comes with German passports. The women acknowledge this privilege, which can produce a feeling of moral obligation towards extended kin. This can be – as the example of Aminata and her family showed in Chapter 8 – a strong commitment to financially supporting family members in Ghana, sometimes beyond one's comfortable limits. The ongoing financial support contributes to the construction of relations of trust and responsibility.

Another motivation for travel is related to practising cultural heritage. The benefit these journeys are supposed to provide the women is not meant in the socioeconomic sense of a gain in status. They are rather intended to enrich the women culturally. Through their travels, they aim to confirm the authenticity of their selves as being of West African descent. Despite the differences in form and circumstances of the various travels, the underlying motivation for engaging in such journeys are comparable – all are fuelled by the wish to connect to a cultural heritage through lived experience. Travel to the country of one's ancestors or parents is a way to acquire or practise cultural competences. It is an important step towards embodying a diasporic identity by means of the lived experiences one has in places one associates with one's African origins. Theis kind of travel gives the women in my study the chance to explore a place and (unknown) family relations with all their senses; to be able to generate memories for the future but also to have the possibility to create relationships to extended family. Forging contacts in the country of ancestral origin makes it possible to practise diasporic identity on an intimate kinship level. There has often been a rupture in diasporic family relations between country of parental origin and country of destination of the migrant parent of the women of my research. For different reasons, personal and geopolitical, it was particularly difficult for some of the women to travel to the ancestral countries as children and teenagers. There was a civil war in Sierra Leone and a politically unstable situation in Guinea, for example – structural barriers that made regular connection with the country of origin impossible, even for their fathers. In Lafia's case, a difficult relationship with her father made travelling unimaginable as a teen and even her father did not regularly travel there. As Anne-Christine Trémon argues in her work on diasporic relations of Tahitians of Chinese descent (2019), diasporic relations can be interrupted and taken up again at a different point in time depending especially on structural barriers and opportunities. Yet my work shows that personal circumstances (family relations, educational paths) are another factor that informs how much the descendants of migrants in particular will engage with ancestral origins. The travels of my interlocutors as adult women are an opportunity to reignite diasporic relations and can be seen as an attempt to fill the void of an interrupted transmission. These journeys are both a way to get closer to parents by getting to know their place of origin and a way to build a personal relationship with a place the women want to define as origins for themselves. Diasporic travels can also be read as an answer to a moral demand stemming from the family and which gets formulated as moral obligation to the self (you have to know your roots), as well as a demand resulting from a racialised position in Germany where the women of African descent are confronted with othering and questions about their 'real origins'. Maya's move to Nigeria is a good example of that. She contends that this move is of particular importance to break with the narrow and one-sided images that are provided in Germany of Africa as a whole. Knowing the reality by having lived there for an extended period and being aware of

how life can be lived there is a weapon that shields her from negative stereotypes of Africa. The move is supposed to give her a feeling of a real and complex picture of Nigeria, besides being also a way to explore and improve her cultural skills as someone of West African descent.

Epilogue

The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the summer of 2020 happened during the writing-up phase of my PhD thesis. It occurred when I had already finished the process of data collection and analysis, which is why this global movement and its effects are not part of this thesis. For future research, it would be pertinent to consider if and how the BLM events of 2020 affected the lives of Afrodescendant people in Germany across different generations. Yet although BLM re-emerged at the very end of me writing my first draft, I wanted to add a few words about it here in the epilogue because I consider these to be important events.

BLM started as a hashtag on social media after police killings of Black children and adults in the USA in 2013. The founders of the hashtag and call for action were three African American women: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi. It quickly moved from the digital space to the streets with demonstrations. Already then, Black Lives Matter chapters had emerged in Berlin, where they still operate today; but the general public quickly forgot about it in the following years. That was until 2020, when the movement returned with bigger protests than ever and global demonstrations protesting the brutal police killing of George Floyd, a middle-aged African American man. Yet the protestors in Germany and Europe were not only interested in protesting against racism and police brutality in the USA and showing solidarity; they particularly wanted to raise awareness of anti-Black racism in their own societies. The second wave of BLM protests in the summer of 2020 were huge and spread rapidly around the globe. Although this coincided with the global Covid-19 pandemic, hundreds of thousands of people all over Europe took to the streets with Black activists standing in the frontline of the protests. In Germany there were demonstrations in Berlin, Frankfurt and many other cities. Many more events took place online and offline. The result was a strengthening of collaborations among activists and political organisations.

Many of my interlocutors took to the streets (as did I) and took their children with them, who had posters saying 'Black Kids Matter'. This is not only about self-fashioning but also about transmitting values (anti-racism, being proud to be of African descent in Germany) to children as a way to fight racism.

Figure 13: Black Lives Matter demonstration in Vienna, 3 June 2020, photo by author

The five women whose lives I follow in this book were involved and affected by the BLM in very diverse ways, from being engaged and organising events to going to demonstrations or simply following it online. These modes of involvement reflect the different positions of each of the women; Layla Zami, for example, was already politically active as a very young adult and because she and Oxana were in the USA at the height of the BLM movement, she participated in many events and demonstrations. Layla also recorded a saxophone piece to remember Breonna Taylor.[1] Lafia, by contrast, only recently became more politically aware about anti-Black racism and Black and feminist identity movements. She marched in the BLM demonstrations, taking her son along, and connected to Black German networks online. Aminata started to actively work in the organisation Initiative for Black People in Germany (ISD). And Maya also began to be more active in the ISD, but only because she is looking to connect with other Black parents in Frankfurt as she has a little son now.

What unites the young adults taking to the streets is the wish for a future where it will not matter anymore what skin colour a person in Germany has. Community is formed as a reaction to the brutal incidences of the present (police brutality against

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1   The piece, *Layla's Lament is Lonnie's Lament is Breonna's Lament is George's Lament is…* is available to listen here: https://soundcloud.com/laylazami/laylaslament?fbclid=IwAR01tELszmd iBiFwscY7GnTkdgaJARpqZFK-z7EeRdAbJ73VOhEnTjA8ED4 (accessed 20 November 2020).

Black people, racial profiling, racist attacks on refugees and People of Colour) and the will to actively change the world for them and their children.

Yet many Afrodescendant people in Germany do not feel represented by the new BLM movement, as Aminata told me recently. She is in contact with people of African descent in Germany who have different realities, who have different battles to fight. As many of the Black people present in the public sphere come from a privileged standpoint – most have German nationality and come from educated middle-class households – many people of African descent in Germany do not consider their reality to be represented. For instance, the reality of those who came as migrants or who belong to a second generation but still do not have access to German nationality can be overlooked. These people are often not part of the lifeworld of those who are taking on leadership roles in the new movements. For example Aminata's colleague who organises the music festival Afrika-Fest in Frankfurt said that he was not interested in the BLM movement. Aminata's colleague is oriented towards the African continent, towards fighting neocolonialism and improving the lives of African citizens in Germany. He does not see many connections, although the fight against racism could be an interesting point in common.

It will be curious to see whether this glocal movement and others to come will have an impact on how millennial women engage with their African descent and racialisation in the future. Yet above all it will be interesting to see if and how the movement impacts on the lives of a younger generation that is about to come of age. Since BLM there has been a rise in awareness-building and a push to publicise books on anti-Black racism in Germany. Suddenly, books such as those by Alice Hasters (*What White People Don't Want to Hear About Racism, but Should Know Anyway*, 2019) and Tupoka Ogette (*Exit Racism*, 2018) are on German bestseller lists, and debates about racism are getting larger platforms and more interest. A further study taking into account, for instance, the generation of the children of my interlocutors, the third generation in terms of descent from a migrant, while also including Afrodescendant people of different social and economic backgrounds would be an interesting next step. It would be worthwhile to study their network-making efforts and to consider the role that being of African descent has (or does not have) in their lives and how they are influenced by parents, grandparents and contemporary movements.

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